Wired and Dangerous:

Maternal Bodies in Cyber(cultural)space

by

Anitra Goriss-Hunter, BA Hons, BA, Dip Ed

Submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Tasmania

August, 2010

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief, no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis.

Anitra Goriss-Hunter

17/08/2010

Anitra Goriss-Hunter

17/08/2010

Abstract

Maternity, like cyber(cultural)space, is contested terrain. Despite challenges from feminism contemporary discussions, images and experiences of maternity are all too often still haunted by notions of the self-sacrificing, domestic and natural Good Mother. In the hope of something different this thesis turns to an investigation of the cyber-realm and the potential of this new domain to overturn dominant discourses of motherhood.

Scholarship investigating intersections of maternity and technology, usually concerned with reproductive technologies, is expanded in this thesis into cyber(cultural)space as the cyber-domain increasingly engages with and is infiltrated by maternal bodies. This thesis draws on conceptualizations of cyber(cultural)space as culture and artefact to extend the popular notion of the cyber-realm as the Internet to include CD ROMs and galleries that display digital art.

The thesis initially considers websites concerned with maternity and their virtual communities. This section begins by investigating commercial maternity sites and focuses on the intertwining of maternity with consumption and the surveillance and commodification of the pregnant and maternal body. It then examines two less commercial and more 'alternative' maternity sites - *The Bad Mothers Club,* with its signature of maternal humour and the e-zine *Hip Mama* and its political debates.

The thesis then turns to two sites of cyber-culture where maternity has not thus far been the focus of critical discussion. It interrogates the capabilities of hypertext in Shelley Jackson's widely distributed CD ROM, *Patchwork Girl.* The focus of discussion about this cyber-feminist re-working of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is its construction of maternity as hybrid, monstrous, fragmented and queer. Shifting further along the spectrum of cyber(cultural)space the thesis visits the works of acclaimed Australian multi-media artist Patricia Piccinini. Her work inspires multiple readings and the discussion teases out the complex possibilities of monstrosity through which it constructs techno-maternities.

The methodology employed owes a debt to Christine Hine's "virtual ethnography" – sustained and deep involvement with and analysis of online interactions and the meanings generated from the resulting connections and disconnections. The analyses rely upon discourse analysis and semiotic analysis in order to access the epistemological and ontological assumptions attached to the texts.

Cyber(cultural)space is no guarantee of subversion and it is not only the commercial websites that make this clear. Nevertheless, the thesis concludes that cyber(cultural)space abounds with possibilities for the overturning of restrictive traditional tropes of mothering. In these cyber-spaces of subversion monstrous outlaw mother-bodies laugh at conventional motherhood as they write a techno-charged, queer and feisty maternity for the twenty-first century.

Acknowledgements

Images of a journey are often used to describe the process of writing a thesis and what a journey this has been for me! Spanning ten years of teaching, researching, writing and mothering work this thesis is like another one of my children to me – sometimes a delight, sometimes sheer hard work without any reward and always requiring energy, creativity, thought and time.

There are so many people to thank. In no particular order at all but always expressed with love and good vibes here are the "Thank yous".

"Thank you" is a completely inadequate for the response I feel is in order for my main supervisor Associate Professor Barbara Baird who is – by her informed critical analysis, straight-shooting comments and nurturing style of supervision – in spirit a Mother Outlaw. Barbara has been an indefatigable reader of many drafts of the thesis over many years. Her assistance in keeping me on track with my academic work during some tumultuous life events – the birth of three children, illness and interstate relocations - has been invaluable. Barbara has been incredibly generous with her time and energy often pondering an issue or problem and later contacting me to suggest some innovative solutions. Discussions with Barbara concerning my work always left me feeling inspired to go out and tackle the topic in engaged and creative ways. Our supervisory meetings were also always filled with lots and lots of laughter.

Thank you to my Associate Supervisor Dr Llewellyn Negrin who read and commented upon a number of drafts. Her friendly and down to earth approach was greatly appreciated.

Thank you to the academics that have supported my work especially Dr Elizabeth McMahon, Dr Jennifer Livett, Dr Felicity Plunkett, Professor Jeff Malpas and Professor Ian Buchanan.

So many thanks need to be offered to my fellow Gender Studies colleagues Miranda Morris and Louise North for their support and advice.

To the occupants of Room 360 in the School of Philosophy, especially Tessa, Bruce and Eliza thank you for your academic support and camaraderie. Break times and lunch were always times of discussion and laughter.

Thank you to the computer technical support people and administration staff in the School of Philosophy for promptly dealing with problems as they arose.

Many thanks to the Carers at Lady Gowrie Battery Point Child Centre, Hobart – especially Dominic, Katherine, Katrina, Sue, Sebastian and Renee - and The Little

Graduates Children's Centre, Mount Helen especially Jody and Naoma. I could concentrate on writing, thinking and teaching knowing that my children were well-cared for and having a great deal of fun.

While I was engaged in my exciting journey of learning it was good to know that my children were also enjoying their own travels among different knowledges at school. So many thanks to all the teachers who inspired and nurtured my children at school especially Jo Nolan, Nancy Schaffner, Scott McGlynn, Mark Muldoon, Debbie Finlay and Matt Reyntjes.

As dance, music and drama are as important as the air that we breathe to my children I want to thank all those wonderfully creative people who teach at the Ballarat Centre of Music and the Arts (our second home). Thank you to teachers Jade, Emma, Kylie, Airleigh, Luke and Terri. Thank you to the Junior and Senior Hip Hop Troupes and the Junior Neo-Classical Troupe. And, of course, Paula who runs the show!

Thank you to all the people involved in the Ballarat Light Opera Company's junior production of Peter Pan who helped Uisce find his inner Pirate.

My PhD candidature would certainly have been a dry old time without friends to share it with and so I thank those people who patiently listened to many of my debriefings about my thesis and often enjoyed a drink or two along the way. Thank you to my breastfeeding buddies, - Fiona P, Leigh, Fiona H, Sara and Carolyn. Many thanks to my Facebook buddies for great, often late night, discussions about a wide range of topics.

Thank you to Frances for words of encouragement and offers of babysitting.

Many thank yous and hugs to my ever-supportive, and now interstate besties:

Nerine for chatting to me over the phone even while cooking dinner.

Melissa for her supportive words and always being ready to have a chat about academic and/or mothering things and/or anything at all really.

Sara for our regular Monday morning walks on the beach, café time and great family get-togethers while we were all in Hobart. And now our looooooooooong long distance phone calls.

Susan, my long-time friend, for all of your thoughtful and funny phone calls, sms messages, and good vibrations (I felt them and they helped).

As well as friends my family was a great source of support, love and fun throughout my candidature.

A purry thank you to Griffin our cat who often curled up in my lap or draped himself across my keyboard as I tried to type. And thank you to the guinea pigs Bushy, Tinky and the Tinkettes for your noisy company every day as I worked.

It is fitting that having expended a considerable amount of time and energy thinking, writing and doing maternity that I thank the two primary mother figures in my life – my grandmother, Sybil and my mother Dolores.

With huge hugs and kisses I thank my children Uisce, Akalia and Jayva for the unwavering love and joy they give to me. My children are the inspiration for this thesis on cybermaternities and I dedicate it to them. If not for those tender little questioning bodies I would have given up long ago at one of the many obstacles I have encountered in completing this thesis. Becoming a mother has firmed my resolve to write *as* a maternal body while undertaking investigations of a range of issues pertaining to maternity. There is much work still to be done researching, writing and thinking about the various ways that mothers *do* maternity and the structural and cultural issues that impact upon these activities.

And, to Richard, my partner who deserves not only a paragraph but a thesis of thanks for not only supporting me emotionally through this difficult time but also taking on board all the myriad household tasks and child-caring that enabled me to think and write. Despite his extremely heavy workload he also found time to drive children to their beloved extracurricular activities and even have a moment or two of fun with them. And I send a thousand thanks to Richard for his help with formatting and wrestling with a thesis template that, unaccountably, did not love my thesis. I would not have made it through without you, my love.

And finally, I send out many thanks to the wonderful array of Bad, Hip, Outlaw, queer, monstrous and cyber mothers who I've met during my travels in cyber(cultural)space. You give me hope that we will eventually put the Good Mother out to pasture in fields far far away from all of us so we can relax and be our monstrous maternal selves.

Work/Life Balance

To Uisce, Akalia and Jayva

You inspire and sustain me, my great loves

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Chapter 1
Introduction

The new momism is not about subservience to men. It is about subservience to children. And there's nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. On the surface, the call to motherhood seems more liberated, if you will, than the stifling housewifery of the 1950s. And in a way it is. But beware what lurks beneath. Whether you are a married religious fundamentalist, a partnered lesbian, a divorced secular humanist with a Ph.D., or a single twenty-year-old trying to make it in the big city, if you are a female human, the new momism has circled the wagons around you. This is not to say that young mothers today are any less savvy than their predecessors in seeing through media hype. They are simply surrounded, in a way their mothers were not, by efforts to commercialize virtually every step of pregnancy and childrearing.[1]

The project is one of unravelling the masculinist codes which surround the production, marketing and use of computer technologies, debunking the myths which suggest that there is some biological determinant which alienates women from computers, and encouraging them to acquire the skills and language necessary to negotiate the field.

I believe that women hijacking the tools which are traditionally used for domination and control can introduce a rupture into a highly systematised culture which diverts the machines from their 'important work', their inherent imperative of world control and domination-linear top-down mastery ...This 'rupture in the system' can take the form of feminist artmaking, exhibited virtually and in the world as we know it ... guerrilla girl activism in virtual communities, hypertext environments published on the World Wide Web (WWW), the development of feminist computer games and so on ... [2]

---

1 Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels, *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How it has Undermined Women*, (New York: Free Press, 2004), p. 299.

2 Virginia Barrett, 'Remapping Cyberspace with a Feminist Bent', *Women Writing: Views and Prospects 1975-1995* series, National Library of Australia, available at http://www.nla.gov.au/events/barrett.html, date accessed 3/8/09.

Talkin' 'bout someone who became a mum

Becoming a mother is cataclysmic. It is experienced in a myriad of ways but always the act signals change – death and beginnings. When I became a mother for the first time my body was gripped by uncompromising forces of childbirth that pummeled and rent my flesh. For some time after the birth moments of deep bliss transported me when I looked at my baby. But alongside these moments, a heaviness flattened my world. I turned to words, thoughts and ideas to help me understand this complete and sometimes terrifying transformation of maternity. I found a copy of Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* and read it crying in the library. Rich's descriptions of the joys of mothering as well as her honest and critical insights into the institution of motherhood spoke her journey into maternity. She was also speaking parts of *my* story of mothering. The heaviness that rendered life cardboard-flat gradually receded as I partially returned to words, ideas and story.

At the time I discovered Rich's maternal writings I had completed a project on the "bold new territory" of cyberspace. Having enjoyed the feisty feminism of the geekgirls, grrrls and other activists as well as being excited by Rich's work I turned to cyberspace, hungry for stories of mothering. What I found intriguing in this domain was the co-mingling of convention, subversion and the enormous possibility for change. Of course, I had to write about it and this thesis tracks those explorations of moments where conventional representations of maternity are reinscribed and/or challenged in the fascinating and potentially liberating domain of cyber(cultural)space.

My writings concerning maternity in cyber(cultural)space are inflected by my subject position as a woman of colour who can pass for white, Australian, Generation X, feminist mother of three young children who desired, at first, a drug-free and unassisted childbirth as well as immersion in attachment parenting. From my own experience of childbirth and childrearing I have come to understand that some bodies, like mine, require technological interventions in order to give birth and desire space rather than enforced attachment in any child care arrangements. From this standpoint my positioning as a maternal body is fragmented, shifting, always slightly askew from normative motherhood. This fractured maternity contributes to my interest in examining images of mothering that shift beyond traditional tropes of maternal bodies. In this thesis I focus on a range of techno-maternities in a variety of cyber-dimensions.

Maternal Bodies

Maternity, like cyberspace, is contested terrain. Just as notions of what it is to be a female in western culture changed irrevocably when feminist critiques demonstrated that "Woman" was actually "women", the idealized "Mother" is currently morphing into "mothers" as mother-voices increasingly tell their truths in a variety of media. In the early twenty-first century, Mother still has quite a few helpers but also a growing number of critics from amongst the ranks of maternal bodies – those who do the work of mothering in a vast range of social, political and cultural contexts.

In print and online media the topics of motherhood and motherwork frequently arouse heated debate in western popular culture and contemporary feminist theory. One of the dominant tensions in representations of maternity in texts in the late 1990s/early 2000s is the tension between the conventional mother who stays at home and the mother who "juggles" paid work and domestic duties. Labelled as the Mummy Wars in certain sections of the popular media these two constructions are often depicted in articles, essays and books as competing positions although some texts offer more nuanced critiques of contemporary mothering. Quality childcare, maternity leave, "family friendly" workplace policies, and government benefits are just some of the issues around which the broader debate evolves. These discussions are often underpinned by essentialist notions concerning child health and well-being as solely dependent on "good" mothering. While there are numerous instances of current texts from authors based in Britain, the United States and Canada that support this model of maternity I turn to Australian examples as I am most familiar with these publications and the culture from which they emerge. The majority of texts published on these topics assume, it should be noted, a white often middle-class heterosexual maternity. [3]

---

[3] Recent examples of this kind of traditional motherhood are found in Anne Manne's book *Motherhood: How Should We Care For Our Children?* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2005) and Ita Buttrose and Penny Adams, *Mother Guilt: Australian Women Reveal Their True Feelings About Motherhood*, (Camberwell, Vic: Viking: 2005). In their books Manne, Buttrose and Adams argue that as a result of the "choices" that ensued from "women's liberation" women imagined they could "have it all" – career and children. Manne, *Motherhood.* Comments about "choices" and "women's liberation" are made by Ita Buttrose in an article in which *Mother Guilt* is discussed by Catherine Keenan, 'It's Not your Fault, Mum, so don't Feel Guilty', January 31, 2005, *The Sydney Morning Herald, smh.com.au,* available at http://www.smh.com.au/news/Books/Its-not-your-fault-Mum/2005/01/30/1107020258706.html, date accessed 29/8/09.

Leading Australian feminist researcher and media commentator, Barbara Pocock provides an acclaimed example of academic investigations of the issues that make up the debate about stay-at-home versus juggling mothers that she clusters together under the heading of work/life balance.[4] Pocock discusses the prevalence of conventional notions of the Good/Proper Mother which haunt current maternity debates. Pocock draws upon United States sociologist Sharon Hays' work to argue that the Proper Mother (re)surfaces in the currently popular contemporary context in the concept of "intensive mothering".[5] Hays describes intensive mothering as "the willingness to expend a great deal of physical, emotional, cognitive and financial resources on the

---

While Buttrose and Adams are more sympathetic than Manne to mothers in paid employment even talking about balancing work and family commitments the authors still castigate working mothers for not spending enough time with their children.

The topic of "juggling" paid work, child care and other maternal experiences is explored with more equanimity than Buttrose and Adams' text in the work of Mia Freedman who is characterised in some advertisements for her new book as "the voice of her generation [X]". This quote is sourced from *Mama Mia: A Memoir of Mistakes, Magazines and Motherhood,* advertisement at *Booktopia*, available at http://www.booktopia.com.au/mama-mia-a-memoir-of-mistakes-magazines-and-motherhood/prod9780732281892.html, date accessed 29/8/09.

Freedman writes a weekly column in the *Sunday Age* and *Herald-Sun* as well as regularly updating her online blog, *MamaMia,* an online version of mainstream magazines. See Mia Freedman, *MamaMia* available at http://mamamia.com.au/weblog/. In her blog she discusses issues of contemporary maternity, body image, relationships and celebrities.

Going beyond Mia Freedman's forays into territory that is not usually covered by maternity texts, journalist Susan Maushart investigates mothering by identifying and attempting to tell the truths of maternity as she perceives it in her acclaimed book *The Mask of Motherhood: How Becoming a Mother Changes Everything And Why We Pretend It Doesn't*, (New York: New Press, 1999).

In this book Maushart argues that women do not tell the truth about maternity, instead mothers remain silent on a number of issues hiding behind romanticized and sentimental depictions of maternal bodies and the work they perform. According to Maushart this "sugar-coating" of maternity narratives results in frustration, exhaustion and even mental illness. The solution offered – to listen to the stories of mothers and "sisters" – seems rather vague and general in comparison with the sharply insightful critiques of mothering that precede this conclusion.

[4] Barbara Pocock, *Work/Life Collision: What Work is Doing to Australians and What to do About It*, (Annandale, NSW: Federation Press, 2003). For another example of an academic text discussing work/life balance see Suzanne Franzway, 'Work and family life: what we've forgotten', *Australian Review of Public Affairs*, 4 April 2005, School of Economics and Political Science, The University of Sydney, available at http://www.australianreview.net/digest/2005/04/franzway.html, date accessed 3/12/06.

[5] Sharon Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

child".[6] In order to come to terms with the dissonance between the stereotype of intensive mothering and the reality of many mothers' lives, Pocock and Hays argue that maternal bodies perform "ideological work" that includes the justification of their own position regarding motherhood.[7] The justifications all too often arouse in maternal bodies ubiquitous feelings of guilt and produce criticisms of other women's ways of doing maternity. These rationalisations and their negative effects are fuelled by and mirrored in the Mummy Wars.

Pocock draws attention to the disjunction between the ideal of intensive mothering and the reality of not-enough-time maternity. She makes connections between the guilt that attends this rupture as well as outlining the fallout from combining paid work and maternity - exhaustion and the increased consumption of take-away meals and commercial products.[8] Pocock argues that this constellation of dissonance, guilt and outsourcing of domestic production fuels a maternity that is increasingly intertwined with the market and capitalism. That is, the buying of "stuff" for children goes some way, in the maternal imaginary, towards relieving feelings of guilt concerning the absent working mother. Pocock states that while the extent of maternal involvement in childrearing continues to be a controversial issue in all media, discussions about this topic fail to explore other vitally important concerns. These issues include the absenteeism of fathers from child-related responsibilities, lack of extended family and community support, workplaces that do not promote "family-friendly" policies, and unrealistic traditional models of motherhood. Discussions of work/life balance are so widely reported in a range of media as well as occurring in formal and informal situations that even former Australian Prime Minister John Howard – a staunch supporter of traditional motherhood – acknowledged the legitimacy of the issue by calling it a "barbeque stopper".[9]

---

6 Sharon Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, cited in Barbara Pocock, *Work/Life Collision: What Work is Doing to Australians and What to do About It*, (Annandale, NSW: Federation Press, 2003), p. 81.

7 Pocock, *Work/Life Collision*, p. 83.

8 Ibid, pp. 96-98.

9 Kerry Maxwell, 'New Word of Mouth', *Macmillan English Dictionaries Magazine*, Issue 31, June 2005, available at http://www.macmillandictionaries.com/MED-Magazine/June2005/31-New-Word-BBQ.htm, date accessed 6/10/09.

But the problem for mothers in negotiating the public/private divide is not all about home and paid work. In the very act of breastfeeding, an exemplary case of female maternal specificity, women encounter another set of public/private divides. Breastfeeding narratives in mainstream and academic texts as well as the stories of lived experience of maternal breastfeeding bodies sum up a divided discourse of breasts and breastfeeding. In these texts breastfeeding is described as a "natural" activity replete with numerous positive health outcomes. In order to perform this healthy "natural" activity, however, the mobilization is necessary of a constellation of breasts, bodies, knowledge, rehearsal, intent as well as maternal desire and need. And therein lies the problem. Women's bodies are traditionally depicted as being in the service of others and they are not meant to take up public space. As Iris Marion Young argues, masculinist thinking defines a woman's breasts not as her own but as objects for others – "her husband, her lover, her baby".[10] Women's breasts are to be looked at often within the frame of an advertisement, screen, page or artwork.

Attempts to contain and limit women's breastfeeding bodies are challenged in acts of breastfeeding outside the home and organised mass breastfeeding events. These acts claim public space for women and supports decisions they make concerning the way they use their own bodies. For instance, after the birth of my first child my group of breastfeeding buddies and I attended Breastfest 99 the mass (breast)feed-in organised in the middle of International Breastfeeding Week in August 1999.[11] This event brought breastfeeding bodies to the attention of the public. Breastfest 99 was held at Wrestpoint casino that year and we re-named the site Breastpoint for the day. Although I had previously fed my baby in group settings the sheer scale of this feed-in where hundreds of breastfeeding mothers and babies gathered amplified my feelings of transgression at releasing my breasts in public and using them to feed my baby.[12] I attended other Breastfests with my other babies and each time I felt a sense of bodily

---

[10] Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: 'Throwing Like a Girl' and Other Essays*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 80.

[11] 'SA Women Vie For World Breastfeeding Record', AAP General News (Australia), 4th August, 1999, available at http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P1-22479996.html, date accessed 20/8/09.

[12] For a detailed analysis of public mass breastfeeding events see Alison Bartlett, 'Scandalous practices and political performances: breastfeeding in the city'. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 16, 1 (2002): 111-121.

breaking through boundaries of conventional models of maternity with a connectedness, for the moment, with other breastfeeding bodies.

When women claim space for themselves in public as well as demonstrating the intent to use their bodies for their own purposes in the act of breastfeeding narratives of impropriety, immodesty and thoughtless behaviour arise. Australian academic Alison Bartlett argues that acts of public breastfeeding raise questions concerning popular narratives of feminine and maternal sexuality and women's occupation of public space as well as their constitution as citizens.[13] It is significant to note that in the last years of the first decade of early twenty-first century Australia I am observing the same arguments, stories and experiences that depict breastfeeding as natural and healthy but also an act that must be hidden that I remember exclaiming over almost ten years ago. Clearly there is much work to be done in liberating breastfeeding from its interment in the "natural" and breastfeeding mothers from banishment to homes, back rooms and toilets.

While I do not want to suggest that issues of race are absent from the previous two stories of mothering those discussions foreground issues of work, class, emotion and embodiment. The foregrounding of the stories of the Indigenous stolen generations in Australia over the last decade has brought the issue of race as a key determinant of motherhood to popular attention. [14] Although "race" is a construct the meanings that cohere around this construction engender racism which affects the lived experiences of people who encounter discriminations or privileges as a direct result of racial categorizations.[15] Indigenous academic Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues that the stories of the lives of Indigenous women illustrate "the fundamental incommensurability within our nation".[16] That is, some versions of white history relate as a story of discovery and settlement a process which was, for Indigenous

---

[13] Ibid.

[14] Horrific tales of enforced removal of Indigenous children from their homes and communities are related in *Bringing Them Home: The Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*. The Inquiry that led to this report was instigated as a result of pressure from Indigenous communities and activists who argued that a general ignorance about the events of this period was allowing the needs of those who had suffered to go unrecognised and unmet leading to a range of ongoing problems in Indigenous communities.

[15] Bartlett, *Breastwork: Rethinking Breastfeeding*, (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2005), p. 137

[16] Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' Up To The White Woman: Indigenous Women And Feminism* (St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2000), p. 15.

Australians, a bloody invasion of dispossession.[17] "Another incommensurability" writes Moreton-Robinson "is that what for White Australia was cheap labour and a civilising mission, for Indigenous women constituted stolen children and slavery".[18] Although the stories of the Stolen Generation are located in a specific time period these accounts tell of racial and maternal politics that are still current in Australia today. The embedding of these narratives in a range of social, cultural and political arenas results in a significant gap between the general health, education and work prospects of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. This gap is also identifiable in the different levels of maternity and childbirth services, life expectancies, medical care, and representation in gaols and corrective institutions that divides Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The "fundamental incommensurability" identified by Moreton-Robinson surfaces in stories of unfulfilled maternal desire as Indigenous mothers desperately try to literally hold on to their children whereas (middle class) white mothers attempt to escape from the restrictions of being sole carer to children by paying others to care for them.

The contest over maternity, and its historically different embodiments, is not just a matter of academic or political and policy debate, and the three snapshots of this contest – work/life balance, embodied politics of mothering and race as a shaping factor - are exemplars rather than an exhaustive account of the field. How could they be when maternity is represented everywhere, not least in the popular media. Maternal bodies are currently the subject of intense public debate and scrutiny by media in many western nations. Both print and electronic media devote considerable space to the scrutiny of mothers categorised as Super, Yummy, celebrity, teenage, single, lesbian, welfare, soccer mums and bad (even monstrous).[19]

---

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] A Super Mom(mum) is a "cultural icon of femininity" who effortlessly combines the idealized notions of conventional motherhood as well as a successful professional career. This information is sourced from Craig J. Thompson, 'Caring Consumers: Gendered Consumption Meanings and the Juggling Lifestyle', *The Journal of Consumer Research* 22, 4 March (1996): 388-407. A Yummy Mummy is " an attractive older woman or mother". This information is sourced from Walter Rader, *The Online Slang Dictionary*, available at http://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~wrader/slang/index.html. A "soccer mom" is defined as a middle-class mother, well-groomed and wealthy who spends a great deal of time transporting children to extra-curricular activities. This information is sourced from *The Online Slang Dictionary* entry available at http://onlineslangdictionary.com/definitionbec, date accessed 14/12/06.

Representations of maternal bodies in popular and academic cultures depict and help to shape complex feelings about motherhood. One of the most problematic issues for western feminist artists and scholars has been to take control over the way women are represented. Feminist art critic Jo Anna Isaak writes "As mothers, as daughters, as artists, but most of all as women we all have a stake in displacing the bio-maternal determinism that lies hidden in the seemingly benign representations of motherhood. Women artists have always worked in a Catch-22 situation and the catch is motherhood – an "original" division of labor: women have babies; men create art."[20] Historically, representations of maternal bodies have most often been crafted by male authors or artists – or sometimes women writing as not-mothers. As writer Susan Suleiman posits "Mothers don't write, they are written".[21] Contemporary feminist-inspired publications discussing maternity move towards correcting this situation.

I argue that while the ubiquitous images of maternal bodies are not necessarily always of women, the majority of these representations are of female mothers. Traditionally, maternal bodies are constructed as variations of the Good/Proper Mum or the Bad Mum. The Good Mother is sometimes represented as frumpy, but always ordinary, "down-to-earth", domestic, completely knowable and dependable rather like a valued kitchen appliance. She is Queen of innumerable advertising campaigns promoting domestic products such as dishwashing and laundry liquid, whitegoods, food items, and household appliances. The Supermum is a contemporary version of the Good Mother.

Feminist discourses of mothering respond to culturally sanctioned narratives of Good Motherhood in a number of ways. One kind of response arises from groups and websites like the Bad Mothers of the *Bad Mothers Club* (*BMC*) which I discuss in detail in Chapter Three. These sites of "Bad Maternity" openly celebrate their "failures" and critiques of the Supermum ideal. But these challenges to convention are still haunted and limited by constructions of the "Bad Mum". While the Bad Mothers of *BMC* are self-consciously drawing attention to their status as standing outside the

---

[20] Jo Anna Isaak, *Feminism & Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 140.

[21] Susan Rubin Suleiman, 'Writing and Motherhood' in *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in. Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation* edited by Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane, and Madelon Sprengnether, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 352-77, p. 356.

domain of normative motherhood, other types of maternal bodies often draw censure from discussions held in the popular media. Those mothers constructed as "Bad" by popular media and discourse include welfare mums, lesbian mums, single mums, mothers who leave their children, mothers who kill their children, mothers with drug issues, mothers who are surviving domestic violence, mothers of colour, "white trash" mums, and working class mums. This is by no means an exhaustive list of all the particular types of "Bad" mothers as new categories are continually being birthed by an inventive media intent on the surveillance and disciplining of maternal bodies.

A newcomer to the Good Mother cast in contemporary mainstream texts is the Yummy Mummy who is often also a Celebrity Mum. The Yummy Mummy seems to have displaced the various Royal families in the popularity stakes of contemporary women's magazines. Magazines *NW* and *Who Weekly* frequently use photographs of pregnant celebrities in their gossip columns and run features that discuss how to recognise a Yummy Mummy. The successful Yummy Mummy acts out the role of mother but without any signs of maternal difference from those who do not have children. Rather than a celebration of mothering, this preoccupation with celebrity maternity seems to cast a patina of desirability and ease around having and raising children that people who do not have access to the wealth and resources of the Yummy Mummies simply cannot attain. It is significant to note that the Yummy Mummies themselves do not perform all the work of mothering and its associated tasks as they often outsource much of this work to nannies, chefs, nurses and other staff. In these figures of easy and smiling maternal bodies there seems to be something of a turning back to the happy housewife and contented mother of the 1950s as discussed in Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born.*

It is obvious that there are serious problems with the ways in which maternal bodies are described and defined. Women in the West are still primary carers of children while many also assume added responsibilities with paid work leading to a lack of work/life balance and an abundance of maternal guilt. Mothering, in the popular imaginary, is still roped to concepts of the natural and conventional notions of female bodies, sexuality and maternity that attempt to corral women within the home. The white middle-class maternal body is assumed to be the norm which renders invisible the bodies of mothers of colour and Indigenous mothers. Representations of

Good and Bad Mothers, Supermums, as well as Yummy/Celebrity Mummies offer narrow, restrictive and prescriptive scripts for maternal bodies. My thesis responds to these issues and I seek solutions for these problems in cyber(cultural)space.

As we are increasingly becoming technologized subjects I want to investigate cyber-images of maternal bodies. Narratives of maternity infiltrate cyber(cultural)space just as the cyber-domain plays a part in the shaping and maintenance of representations of mothering. In order to tease out some of the threads that bind maternal bodies to and release them from traditional images of maternity in contemporary technologised culture I now turn to an exploration of cyber(cultural)space. As a domain, cyber(cultural)space is readily identified with technological innovation in the popular imaginary. Is this the realm where normative representations of maternity are obliterated in galaxies of different maternal bodies? Is the cyber-realm merely a trendy technology of imported Good Mothers rather than a diversity of maternal bodies? In what ways are the complexities of maternity represented in the cyber-domain? How do representations of maternal bodies work in cyber(cultural)space to construct a discourse of contemporary maternity?

Cyber(cultural)space

In the hope of finding representations of maternal bodies that go beyond the normative images I turn to an investigation of the cyber-realm and the potential of this new domain to overturn dominant discourses of motherhood. I derive great enjoyment from seeing and reading the feisty ways in which cyber-feminists on the Net thumb their noses at male-defined culture while obviously having a good time. The websites of VNS Matrix, *Geekgirl, Bust Magazine* and *Disgruntled Housewife* to name just a few display witty cyber-feminist challenges to dominant discourses of femininity.[22] If these ruptures of masculinist narratives work so effectively, creatively and humorously in the cyber-realm I have wondered whether the cyber-domain would also be the space where conventional representations of maternity could be overturned.

---

[22] For just a small sample of the cyberfeminist sites see VNS Matrix home page is available at http://lx.sysx.org/vnsmatrix.html, date accessed 6/9/08; Rosie X, *Geekgirl*, available at http://www.geekgirl.com.au/blog/, date accessed 6/9/09; *Bust Magazine* available at http://www.bust.com/, date accessed 6/9/09; and, Nikol Lohr, *Disgruntled Housewife*, now archive only as new material is not being added, available at http://www.disgruntledhousewife.com/, date accessed 6/9/09.

The allure of cyber(cultural)space lies in its resistance to stability and closure which makes it an appropriate medium in which to conduct feminist interventions that produce descriptions and reclamations of maternity as well as identifications of the maternal body as a site of defiance. A-linear and boundary-blurring cyber(cultural)space continually gestures towards and away from itself. For example, hypertext – the process of linking chunks of cyber-text - offers the opportunity for reader/users to write and restructure their own narratives from existing texts. The open-ended qualities of hypertext refuse closure and encourage connection. These capabilities present the potential for maternal bodies to join with others in writing their own stories of lived mothering which, in turn, enacts multiple creative rejections of male-dominated versions of motherhood.

The geography of cyber(cultural)space includes many different digital technologies. Although the terms Internet and World Wide Web are popularly used interchangeably to refer to the plethora of websites and programs that form cyberspace, they perform different functions. The Internet forms the physical infrastructure of cyberspace in hardware such as computers, cables, satellites and satellite dishes, as well as routers. It provides various programs and software including the World Wide Web, email, chat rooms, bulletin boards (BBS), and multi-user domains (MUDs and/or dungeons), which enables the performance of a variety of functions. A number of systems closely related to the cyber-realm involve digital imaging processes, virtual reality, biomedical technologies, artificial life, and interactive entertainment centres. One of the innovations of this thesis is that I expand the notion of cyber(cultural)space as websites and online texts to include public exhibition and imagined space in which people and objects created by and infused with new technologies interact.

Definitions and descriptions of cyberspace are usually either utopian or dystopian. For instance, academic Kevin Robins claims that "You might think of cyberspace as a utopian vision for postmodern times".[23] Cybertheorist Nicole Stenger states that "cyberspace is like Oz - it is, we get there, but it has no location and it opens up space

---

[23] Kevin Robins, 'Cyberspace And The World We Live In', in *The Cybercultures Reader*

for collective restoration, and for peace ... our future can only take on a luminous dimension".[24] Cyberspace has been described most famously by author William Gibson as

> A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation by children being taught mathematical concepts ... A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding ...[25]

In *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace*, Margaret Wertheim posits that cyberspace is constructed as a contemporary technological alternative to the space generated by Christian theology that is commonly known as heaven.[26]

On the other hand the phenomena known popularly as cyberspace has also been described in Orwellian terms of surveillance by a monolithic Big Brother - or numerous Little Brothers - who assume control through information storage and analysis.[27] For instance academic Langdon Winner argues that workers, especially those in low-status clerical occupations, will experience more alienation and surveillance as a result of their immersion in computer technology in the workplace.[28]

As well as being a means of rigid control and enforcement, cyber(cultural)space is also constructed in its dystopian mode as a realm where the endless possibilities suggested by those utopian cyber-theorists are not liberating but, instead, short-circuit the development of meaningful connections, providing a distraction from the "real" issues of the physical world. Some cyber-theorists claim that interactions in

---

edited by David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy (London: Routledge, 2000), 77-95, p. 77.

[24] Niccole Stenger, 'Mind is a leaking rainbow', in *Cyberspace: First Steps* edited by Michael Benedikt, (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1991), 48-57, p. 53.

[25] Williamm Gibson, *Neuromancer*, (New York: Ace Books, 1984), p. 67.

[26] Margaret Wertheim, *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace: A History of Space from Dante to the Internet*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999).

[27] Roger Clarke, 'Information Technology: Weapon of Authoritarianism or Tool of Democracy?" the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology, Australian National University, available at http://www.anu.edu.au/people/Roger.Clarke/DV/PaperAuthism.html, date accessed: 1 August, 2007.

[28] Langdon Winner, 'Electronic Office: Playpen or Prison' in *Computerization and Controversy* by Rob King, (San Diego: Academic Press, 2nd Edition, 1996), pp. 83-85, p. 83.

cyberspace are superficial and often hostile which can only ever produce shallow and transient forms of community.[29]

Feminist definitions and examinations of cyberspace often align the cyber-realm with male-dominated technology.[30] These dystopian constructions of cyberspace contend that it merely reproduces masculinist discourse imported from the physical realm. Academic Renate Klein states that "I am worried that what is being hailed as the virtual techno-paradise of the new millennium remains as woman hating as does much of real life".[31] Yet other writers express concern about immersions in cyberspace luring people away from sustained engagements with RL. Indeed, feminist writer Susan Hawthorne argues that

> If we become so out of touch with ourselves – our bodies and our minds – and we become completely fragmented psychologically – all that swapping of identities and genders – and further that we hardly move from our computer screens inside the house, let alone into the garden or the wilderness – who and what will be? Where will our feminism be?[32]

In the utopian/dystopian debate the issues at stake are freedom from RL constraints, surveillance, heaven, employment, gender discrimination, alienation from nature, connections and community. And so utopian/dystopian arguments construct cyberspace as a place of either good or evil. But how is cyberspace imagined as a space?

---

[29] For a small sample of these theorists see James R. Beninger, 'Personalization of Mass Media and the gGowth of Pseudo-Community', *Communication Research*, 13, 3 (1987): 352-371; Michael Noll, *Highway of Dreams: A Critical View along the Information Superhighway*, (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1997); and, Clifford Stoll, *Silicon Snake Oil: Second Thoughts on the Information Highway*, (New York: Doubleday, 1995).

[30] For a few examples of a dystopian feminist view see Renate Klein, 'The Politics of Cyberfeminism: If I'm a Cyborg Rather than a Goddess will Patriarchy Go Away?' in *Cyberfeminism: Connectivity, Critique and Creativity*, edited by Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein, (North Melbourne, Vic: Spinifex Press, 1999), pp. 185-212. Susan Hawthorne, 'Cyborgs, Virtual Bodies and Organic Bodies: Theoretical Feminist Responses' in *Cyberfeminism: Connectivity, Critique and Creativity*, edited by Hawthorne and Klein, pp. 213-249. Leslie G. Roman and Linda Eyre (eds), *Dangerous Territories: Struggles for Difference and Equality in Education*, (New York:Routledge, 1997), pp. 259-261.

[31] Renate Klein, 'The Politics of Cyberfeminism', p. 186.

[32] Hawthorne, 'Cyborgs, Virtual Bodies', p. 230.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of the rhizome goes beyond the good/evil binary that many theorists use to describe cyberspace.[33] This notion of the rhizome has become one of the core concepts used by cyber-theorists in their examinations of cyberspace. Both cyberspace and rhizomes are formed by the branching designs and associative knowledges that speak of contradiction, multiplicity and hyperconnection. The concept of the rhizome evokes a model of bulbous growths situated just under the ground's surface that proliferate erratically. This organic image for a technological phenomenon, underlines the paradoxical, non-linear, interactive, and animative qualities of cyberspace.

In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari's definition of the rhizome refers to non-hierarchical structures of multiplicities and interconnectivities:

> A rhizome as a subterranean stem is absolutely different from roots and radicles. Bulbs and tubers are rhizomes. Plants with roots or radicles may be rhizomorphic in other respects altogether. Burrows are too, in all their functions of shelter, supply, movement, evasion, and breakout. The rhizome itself assumes very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers ... The rhizome includes the best and the worst; potato and couchgrass, or the weed. [34]

The geography of cyberspace also extends along rhizomatic patterns of multiplicity, contradictory juxtapositions and hyperconnectivities. Deleuze-Guattarian scholar Charles Stivale writes of the rhizomatics of cyberspace.[35] Stivale argues that cyberspace is continually in a state of being formed by the cross-referential matrix: "Its horizons recede in every direction; it breathes larger, it complexifies, it embraces and involves".[36] Deleuze and Guattari comment directly on cyberspace stating that

> It is transmitting everywhere, at times without let-up, at other times discontinuously. It displaces, it heats up, it devours. It eliminates, it copulates. What a mistake to have ever masculinized this "it"; it is multiply engendered, and engendering. Everywhere it is machines, and not at all metaphorically: machines servicing machines, with their couplings and connections. An organ-machine is plugged into a source-machine, node-to-

---

[33] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Translated by Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

[34] Ibid, pp. 6-7.

[35] Charles J. Stivale, *The Rhizomatics of Cyberspace* available at gopher://lists.village.virginia.edu:70/00pubs/listservs/spoons/deleuze-guattari.archive/papers/stiv.rhi, date accessed 3/5/07.

[36] Ibid.

> node, one emitting a flow, the other cutting it off, yet relaying and emitting again ... In this way we all become bricoleurs ... [37]

Deleuze and Guattari mobilize the notion of the rhizome - proliferations of decentred, chaotic root systems - to challenge what they term the aborescent nature of much writing: a tree-like structure with branches spreading out from a unified centre. The philosophers argue that the rhizome's continual random movements present a necessary challenge to the static linear and hierarchical organisation of the traditional aborescent text.

In cyberspace conventional forms of text are replaced by the use of hypertext. The term "hypertext" refers to a non-linear way of arranging and presenting information. It's organisation of information according to nodes and links enables readers to create their own pathways through narratives instead of pursuing a linear trajectory through a story or article. Hypertext accomplishes this by using links that readers "click on" in order to access required information. Readers are then able to "jump" to various nodes of information, returning to or veering away from earlier pages by accessing the hypertext links.

As well as multiplicity and divergent perceivings cyberspace is also story, culture and experience. Postmodern literary critic N. Katherine Hayles argues that "Cyberspace is created by transforming a data matrix into a landscape in which narratives can happen".[38] The stories of, about and in cyberspace form rhizomic connections in a hypertext that continually needs to be updated. Historical narratives of cyberspace acknowledge military and scientific origins. These stories then note the ways in which cyberspace infiltrates tertiary and then general educational institutions. From the sphere of education, these histories then relate a shift embracing the business and corporate world. Contemporary stories tell of cyberspace's invasion of domestic space. These stories speak of the material aspects of cyberspace - the hardware - which, in turn, play a part in shaping the culture of both cyber and Real Life (RL). Cultural Studies theorist, David Bell employs the notion of hypertextuality to describe "cyberspace as product of and producer of culture simultaneously".[39] It is important to

---

[37] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* p.72.

[38] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 38.

[39] David Bell, *An Introduction to Cybercultures*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 2.

maintain the hypertextual linking of these two concepts in order to understand that cyberspace is continuously produced by and producing discourses of culture. With David Bell I argue that cyberspace is, foremost, "lived culture"[40] : the experiences in the cyber and material realms of booting up, being jacked in or just being wired up.

The notion of the cyber-domain as story, culture and experience effectively constructs cyberspace as cyber(cultural)space.[41] This cyber and cultural space is both contained within the many domains of the screen and hardware and it also leaks around the links and gaps of imaginary and mediated space that is constantly unfolding from monitors, cinema screens, and throughout art galleries. Therefore, I argue that cyberspace or cyber(cultural)space is geography that is mapped in terms of multiplicity, loops and fragmentation as well as dynamic flows. My definition of cyber(cultural)space expands the notion of this domain as the Internet to include the recognition of space as cyber when it is constituted through interaction between bodies, experiences, cultures and new cyber-technologies.

Cyber(cultural)space's rhizomatic structure offers the potential of finding more than one way to think and represent maternity. In this domain maternal subjectivities flow within different streams of data, travelling through rhizomatic cyber(cultural)space, linking and separating to perhaps join again at a different or same juncture. These streams of maternal bodies are not layers that can be superimposed on each other - added or removed at will. The maternal bodies are formed and constantly move producing alliances, couplings and becomings that, in themselves demonstrate the multiplicity and indeterminacy of cyber(cultural)space. This continual movement and hypertextuality produces a rhizomatics of maternal bodies. I argue that these representations of maternal bodies form a *cybermaternity* – that is, images, stories and experiences of maternity enabled by the qualities of cyber(cultural)space hypertext a diversity of meanings of mothers and mother-bodies. Even though many often contradictory meanings concerning maternal bodies are linked through hypertext in cyber(cultural)space the focus on certain aspects of maternity in these texts ensures that some readings are stronger or more dominant than others.

---

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., pp. 1-2, 6-27.

While rhizomatic cyber(cultural)space hosts a vast number of websites supporting restrictively conventional images, narratives and experiences of maternity, it also presents spaces and structures through which it is possible to challenge traditional ways of conceptualizing maternity and live non-traditional maternities. It is precisely in the decentred, non-linear, rhizomatic structures and textures of cyber(cultural)space that subversion of traditional tropes of maternity is enacted. Hypertext linkages enable user/interactors to click-link similar or divergent tropes of mothering. E-zines[42] such as *Hip Mama* (which I discuss in Chapter Three) present opportunities for the reader/interactor to write their own maternal body. These acts of mothers writing mothers take the focus on maternity as the locus for a range of topic areas that are traditionally considered to be outside the scope of what is appropriate for the consideration of mothers - political activism, artwork and sexuality. These streaming rhizomes of representations of maternity overturn the conventional binaries of stay-at-home mum/working mum, good mother/bad mother and conventional/deviant maternal body.

Identities and Bodies – Gender, Race, Sexuality and Class

Some of the most important and contested debates concerning intersections of femininity, maternity and cyber(cultural)space draw upon discourses of identities and bodies. A great deal of feminist and/or poststructuralist theory of the 1990s and twenty-first century, views identity as constructed, fluid and always in context.[43] While there is some concern expressed amongst feminists who fear the loss of

---

[42] E-zines are the online version of print zines. The term "zine" refers to a magazine or newsletter with relatively small numbers of copies that are personally distributed. As a result of the financial and editorial advantages of self-publication, zines were often used in the mid 1970s and 1980s by the growing numbers of youth becoming involved in the phenomena of punk rock and its DIY (do-it-yourself) ethic.The zinesters reject profit-driven means of production and distribution which ensures that zines are unfettered by constraints of content that may affect mainstream magazines.

Zines are also strongly implicated in narratives of current technologies. Advances in digital technologies provide greater opportunities for zinesters to produce and publish their work. Underlining the firm imbrication of zine and technology, the increasing popularity of electronic zines or e-zines transports the print zines' potential for the subversion of conventional magazines into the networked domain of cyber(cultural)space.

[43] For just a few examples see Liz Bondi, 'Locating Identity Politics' in *Place and the Politics of Identity* edited by Michael Keith and Steve Pile, (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 84-101; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1990) and Naomi Zack, Laurie Shrage, and Crispin Sartwell, eds., *Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality: the Big Question* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.

particularity as well as the categories of gender others prefer to focus on multiplicity and mobility examining gender as one thread amongst many when investigating identity.[44] Feminists who draw upon poststructuralist/postmodernist theories argue against notions of the unified self or subject and for the concept of identities as fissured, multiple, and constantly changing.[45] These theories of fractured identities foreground race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Just as there is considerable discussion surrounding identities there is also a plethora of scholarship from a variety of academic disciplines that investigates bodies, their composition, what they are able to do and the meanings that attach to them.[46] Contemporary theory has untied notions of "the body" from historical links with the natural and constructions of it as a brute physical mass, "the site of unruly passions and appetites", perpetually linked with "unpredictable, leaky and disruptive femininity.[47] In current theory "the body" has become "bodies" immersed in flows of power and located in specific contexts. As cultural studies academics Simon Williams and Gillian Bendelow state, "bodies are [now] radically reconfigured as fluid, multiple, fragmented and dispersed."[48] This reconfiguration has been so successful that some theorists argue that postmodern investigations of the body produce abstract theorisations as opposed to considerations of bodies as living, fleshy material entities.[49] This issue is central to cybercultural theory as the lived experiences of the subject need to be examined as well as narratives of disembodiment.

Theories and definitions of identities and embodiment are made even more complicated by their presence in the cyber-realm. Theorisations of identity and embodiment are crucially important in cyber(cultural)space as active participants are

---

[44] See Zack et al, *Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality* and Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, (Cambridge Mass: Blackwell Publishing, 2nd Edition, 1997).

[45] Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, pp. 3-11.

[46] For an overview of this subject I suggest the following as a small sample of scholarship on this topic: Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, (Berkeley: CA: University of California Press, 1993); Barbara Brook, *Feminist Perspectives on the Body*, (London: Longman, 1999); Ruth Holliday and John Hassard, (eds), *Contested Bodies*, (London: Routledge, 2001); Janet Price and Margaret Shildrick, *Feminist Theory and the Body*, (Edinburgh: Edingburgh University Press and New York: Routledge, 1999); and, Simon Williams and Gillian A. Bendelow *The Lived Body: Sociological Themes, Embodied Issues*, (London; Routledge, 1998).

[47] Price and Shildrick, *Feminist Theory and the Body*, p. 2.

[48] Williams and Bendelow, *The Lived Body*, pp. 1-2.

usually able to choose the ways in which they present themselves by using graphics or words in environments that are often text-based. Academic explorations of cyber(cultural)space discuss the tensions between the potentially liberating effects of "identity play" and the negative effects that appropriation of certain identity-markers may entail.[50]

In general, the issues that surface in the discussions concerning markers of identity and notions of embodiment in cyber(cultural)space centre around the manner and effects of self-presentation: passing, the fantasy of the adoption of otherness, and how identities are rendered visible or invisible. Discussions of cyber-embodiment entail a number of different narrative threads. One of these threads writes of leaving the "meat" behind in RL and transforming "the mind" into data. Yet another strand connects the stories and experiences of representations of bodies in the cyber-realm with their RL counterparts.

Cybertheorists argue that the ability to "choose" race when constructing characters representing the self in a number of online environment sanctions the fantasy, prevalent in writings on cybercultures, that it is possible to adopt different raced identities – "the other" - within the safety of cyber(cultural)space.[51] Nevertheless, there are also arguments that focus on the potential of the cyber-domain to overturn raced stereotypes by ensuring reader/interactors are mindful of race issues.[52]

Central issues regarding gender and cyber(cultural)space involve the generally lower levels of access to computers and the skills necessary to operate and maintain

---

[49] Holliday and Hassard, *Contested Bodies*.

[50] For a small range of texts that discuss this topic see David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy, (eds), *The Cybercultures Reader*, (London: Routledge, 2000); Lynn Cherney and Elizabeth Reba Weiss, (eds), *Wired Women: Gender and New Realities in Cyberspace*, (Seattle: Seal Press, 1996); David Gauntlett, (ed), *Web.Studies: Rewiring Media Studies for the Digital Age*, (London: Arnold, 2000); Jennifer Gonzalez, 'The Appended Subject: Race and Identity as Digital Assemblage' in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, edited by Amelia Jones, (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 534-545; Wendy Harcourt (ed), *Women@Internet: Creating New Cultures in Cyberspace*, (London: Zed Books, 1999); Beth E. Kolko, Lisa Nakamura, and Gilbert Rodman (eds), *Race in Cyberspace*, (London: Routledge, 2000); and, Frank Webster and Kevin Robins, 'The Iron Cage of the Information Society', *Information, Communication & Society*, 1 (1998): 23-45.

[51] Gonzalez, 'The appended subject', pp. 535-538. Lisa Nakamura, '"Where do you want to go today?" Cybernetic Tourism, the Internet, and Transnationality', in Kolko et al, *Race in Cyberspace*, (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 15-26.

[52] Nakamura, '"Where do you want to go today?" pp. 15-26.

them attributable to women when compared with men.[53] Feminist writers in this field, urge women to refuse the preponderance of male-dominated discourses in cyber(cultural)space and actively use the cyber-domain as a means of communication and connection.[54] Questions of access to computer technologies are also issues of class in the cyber-realm. Another crucial concern regarding gender in cyber(cultural)space is that of "gender swapping" which occurs when participants "swap" or adopt an online identity that is different to their RL gendered identity. On one hand, "gender swapping" is considered to be a liberatory act that permits reader/interactors to try on and/or discard various performances of gender at will.[55] Conversely, it is perceived to reinforce the limitations of traditional gender types as the more stereotypical acts enable participant to "pass" as a particular gendered identity.[56]

Just as "gender swapping" has the potential to both reinscribe and subvert conventional narratives of gender, expressions of sexuality in cyber(cultural)space possess the possibility of rewriting sexual identities or closing down the possibility for change. Despite claims that heterosexual identity is central in cyber(cultural)space, the cyber-domain is also described as a space of queer activism and engagement.[57] The anonymity of the cyber-realm is one of the features most often mentioned as conducive to cyberqueer safety enabling relatively safe coming-out stories.

These strands of story exist alongside tales of lived experience concerning the actual use of computer technologies and events in the cyber-domain. Thus, identities and notions of embodiment are crucially important in cyber(cultural)space. I draw upon Bell's theorisings of the cyber-realm to argue that "what we find in cyberculture are techno-bodies, rather than tech-nobodies".[58] Considering the online studies and

---

[53] Dale Spender, *Nattering on the Net: Women, Power and Cyberspace,*, (Toronto: Garamand Press, 1996).

[54] For a small sample of these writers see Harcourt, *Women@Internet*; Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein, eds, *Cyberfeminism: Connectivity, Critique and Creativity*, Klein, (North Melbourne, Vic: Spinifex Press, 1999); and, Spender, *Nattering on the Net.*

[55] Ann Kaloski, 'Bisexuals Making out with Cyborgs: Politics, Pleasure, Con/fusion', *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies,* 2, 1 January (1997), 47-64.

[56] Lori Kendall, 'MUDer? I Hardly Know 'er! Adventures of a Feminist MUDer', in *Wired Women* edited by Cherney and Weise, pp. 207-223.

[57] Nina Wakeford, 'Gender and the Landscapes of Computing in an Internet café' in *Virtual Geographies: Bodies, Space and Relations* edited by Mike Crang, Phil Crang and Jon May, (London: Routledge, 1999), pp.178-201.

[58] Bell, *Cybercultures*, p. 141.

research previously mentioned I argue that identity markers of race, gender, class and sexuality do not "disappear" in cyber(cultural)space. I contend that there are fibrous yet firm connections between our cyber-bodies and our RL bodies with their own particular markings of race, gender, class, sexuality. I would also add maternity to that list of identity markers. How identity and embodiment in the cyber-realm intersects with and impacts upon their RL counterparts, however, is an extremely complicated area of investigation that is still being explored.

Academics whose work I've drawn upon in this section argue that in cyber(cultural)space there is a significant and dominant presence of white, western, heterosexual males. The same scholars also envisage cyber(cultural)space as a potentially liberatory realm where subversions of dominant discourses of race, gender, sexuality, class and bodies are possible. The issues raised in the debates concerning identities and bodies summarized here suggest the potential of rewritings of conventional maternity in cyber(cultural)space. In this thesis I argue that just as cyber(cultural)space is the realm of potential overturnings of conventional narratives of identities and bodies it is also the domain where there are possibilities for the subversion of traditional tropes of motherhood. In cyber(cultural)space there is the potential for a significant number of maternal bodies to connect with a globally dispersed and culturally diverse population of mothers. Other possibilities for challenging normative constructions of motherhood include the online "swapping" of various types of maternal entities as reader/interactors "try on" and inhabit, however briefly, different kinds of maternal identities and bodies. The ability to be anonymous in cyber(cultural)space is also an element that contributes to honest accounts of mothering in a relatively safe environment. A strong strand of this potential to reject conventional narratives of identities and bodies in general and feminine/maternal identities and bodies specifically surfaces in cyber(cultural)space in the movement of cyberfeminism.

Cyberfeminisms

In twenty-first century popular culture and academic scholarship, the terms "feminism" and "cyberspace" are often theorised as polysemous, unfixed and constantly fragmenting. Bringing together the two terms, cyberfeminism could be described as a networking of activism, art and theory from a variety of contemporary

feminisms in cyber environments. Cyberfeminism is an elastic term capable of expanding to include the hybridity of cross-breeds of theory from a variety of sources: feminist theory, (cyber)cultural studies, literary theory, media studies, art theory, information systems, and computer science. Multidisciplinary feminist writer, artist and educator Faith Wilding posits that cyberfeminism is currently a notion empty of fixed meaning and open to being shaped by those who are engaged in the practice of contemporary feminist theory.[59] Wilding writes that "Cyberfeminists have the chance to create new formations of feminist theory and practice which address the complex new social conditions created by global technologies".[60] Thus, Wilding's conceptualization of cyberfeminism involves a triadic structure of feminist theory and practice which works within economies of new technologies.

I define cyberfeminism as the recognition and interrogation of differing levels of power available to those in the cyber-domain. These power differentials proceed along fault lines of privilege and limitation enmeshed in circuits of gender, race, sexuality, class, education and able-bodiedness. Cyberfeminists interact with these issues at the level of activism, theory, art, literature, games, or amalgams of some or all of these avenues of expression and social change. Rather than refusing to work in and with what is often considered to be male dominated technology, cyberfeminists passionately embrace technology and use it with humour, irony, and/or pastiche in order to overturn conventional hierarchies of power. This techno-savvy attitude to challenging tired conventional discourses often results in cyberfeminist interventions in cyber(cultural)space that take a variety of forms – personal or collective websites, email lists, cyber-fiction, multi-media works and cyber-art.

From the pivotal point of contemporary feminist thought, cyberfeminism turns its focus towards new technologies of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries interrogating the interstices where gender, bodies, culture and technology meet. Donna Haraway's now famous statement in 1985 proclaiming she would rather be a cyborg than a goddess is one of the earliest cyberfeminist comments.[61] Haraway writes that "I

---

[59] Faith Wilding, 'Where is the Feminism in Cyberfeminism?' *NeME*, 28th March, 2006, available at http://www.neme.org/main/392/cyberfeminism, date accessed 17/11/07.

[60] Wilding, 'Where is the Feminism in Cyberfeminism?'

[61] Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century' in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*,

am making an argument for the cyborg as a fiction mapping our social and bodily reality and as an imaginative resource suggesting some very fruitful couplings".[62] She continues by stating that "Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other".[63] In homage to Haraway, a group of Australian feminist artists and activists, known as VNS Matrix, published the first cyberfeminist manifesto for the twenty-first century in 1991.[64] At approximately the same time, British feminist, Sadie Plant also began using the term, 'cyberfeminism'. In 1997 the first Cyberfeminist International Conference was held in Kassel, Germany.

Not all feminist engagements with cyber(cultural)space are unqualified in their investigation of its potential. Two years before the Cyberfeminist International Conference well-known Australian author, educator and commentator on cyberspace Dale Spender published the first print book to use a feminist framework of analysis to discuss issues concerning the Internet.[65] Australian feminists including Spender, Renate Klein, Rye Senjen, Jane Guthrey, Susan Hawthorne and Josie Arnold are some who have expressed a guarded enthusiasm about the potential of cyberspace for women's political and artistic endeavours.[66] Taking a sometimes cautious and often pragmatic line of argument concerning cyberspace, these authors perceive the digital domain to be currently colonized by male culture but offering many possibilities for female users. Spender writes:

> There are as many issues for feminism in cyberspace as there are in the real world. And just as men got there first in almost every other technological and influential area, and then women had to work to gain a place, so too is the same dynamic operating in the new cyberworld. In education, in the arts, and, of course, in the technology, men are the decision makers and

---

pp. 149-181, (New York: Routledge,)1985], 1991), available at http://www.stanford.edu/dept/HPS/Haraway/CyborgManifesto.html

[62] Ibid, p. 150.

[63] Ibid, p. 175.

[64] S.V. Rossner, 'Through the Lenses of Feminist Theory: Focus on Women and Technology', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*, 2005 26, 1 (2005), p. 23.

[65] Spender, *Nattering on the Net*.

[66] See Rye Senjen and Jane Guthrey, *The Internet for Women*, (North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1996) and Hawthorne and Klein, *Cyberfeminism*. See also abstracts from the Politics of Cyberfeminism Conference, Saturday, 21 September 1996 at Deakin University available at http://www.spinifexpress.com.au/cf/cybercon.htm, date accessed 29/4/02.

> women are in danger of being the consumers of male products. Unless strategic decisions are made. Soon.[67]

This push for women to use the Internet, email and other cyber domains is generally couched in pragmatic terms. To these cyberfeminists, the Internet and the World Wide Web are useful tools to enable further political networking or activism as well as educational activities. The maintenance of communication links is also foregrounded in this analysis of cyberspace – chatting via email, bulletin boards or chat rooms is encouraged. There is a sense from these writings that women have a duty to explore cyberspace in order to win back some cyber-territory from the colonizing boys. Logging on means work, activism or purposeful communication to these feminist writers. There are numerous websites that ably fulfil this function, literally providing space for feminist community, connection and challenges to male dominated aspects of cyberspace.

While the pragmatic pro-cyberspace group argue for women's involvement in the digital domain in terms of work and/or activism, British academic Sadie Plant encourages female cyber-presence from a more theoretical standpoint.[68] Sadie Plant uses the term "cyberfeminism" to describe the "alliance" or "connection" she argues exists between women and technology.[69] Plant states that "women have always been the machine parts for a very much male culture".[70] Furthermore, Plant argues that there is a connection between the continuing development of technological innovations and increasing global access to these advancements with the alleged growing liberation of women from conventional masculine structures of power. Plant maps the rise of technological advancements and women's liberation onto a further discussion of the breaking down of gendered roles and identities.

---

[67] Spender, excerpt from *Nattering on the Net*, published on the Spinifex Press website, available at http://www.spinifexpress.com.au/cf/cybercon.htm, date accessed 29/4/02.

[68] For a few examples of cyberfeminists who focus on a more artistic type of cyberfeminism see Australian VNS Matrix at http://lx.sysx.org/vnsmatrix.html, date accessed 6/5/05; American Faith Wilding, Home site available at http://faithwilding.refugia.net/ date accessed 6/5/05; and, multi-media Australian artist Linda Dement, Projects available at http://www.lindadement.com/, date accessed 6/5/05.

[69] Rosie X, 'Interview with Sadie Plant', *Geekgirl*, Issue 001, (1995), p. 1, available at http://www.geekgirl.com.au/geekgirl/archives/index.shtml, date accessed 12/9/00.

[70] Rosie X, 'Interview with Sadie Plant', *Geekgirl.* P.1.

Sadie Plant and the VNS Matrix are often heralded as the "mothers" of cyberfeminism as a term and as a concept. Yet Plant's cyberfeminist is white, western, educated and is able to spend considerable periods of time refining computer skills for her own purposes. This white, western, educated subject masquerading as Everywoman, the cyberfeminist, tends to get lost in the tired tropes of weaving, knitting and sewing that Plant uses in the hope of binding metaphors of the Net to work that has been conventionally labelled women's work. Plant's work relies heavily upon the liberal feminist notion that an historical trajectory of gradual liberation inevitably, if slowly, frees women from the constraints and limits of a capitalist-patriarchal economy. She grafts this sweeping force of progress and liberation onto the ever-increasing number and scope of technological advancements in the west. However, this somewhat overly optimistic view of inevitable movement and progress does not take into account the ongoing complexities of lived reality within cultures steeped in patriarchal-capitalism. Nor does the liberal feminist standpoint fully consider the matrix of dominations and privileges that inflect subject positions.

Just as Sadie Plant's engagement with cyber(cultural)space is derived from a theoretical focus the VNS Matrix explores cyberfeminist practice from the base level of women who actively work with technological innovation. VNS Matrix began as four feminists living in Adelaide, Australia who were immersed in do-it-yourself playful techno-art. In 1991 they wrote the Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century. VNS Matrix states that "the impetus of the group is to investigate and decipher the narratives of domination and control which surround high technological culture and explore the construction of social space, identity and sexuality in cyberspace".[71] In their artwork, projects and Manifesto, the VNS Matrix strives to overturn the notion that cyberspace is a domain that is masculinist and alienating to women. Both Sadie Plant and the VNS Matrix argue that feminists need to adopt the mantle of cyberfeminist in order to refuse the negative legacy of pairing technology and masculinity and, thus, reject the trap of continuing masculine colonization of cyberspace.

From her desire to explore connections amongst artists as well as activists, Faith Wilding, alongside the group VNS Matrix, includes art among the political activism that drives much of the cyberfeminist presences on the Web. Wilding founded and

works with cyberfeminist group subRosa, in order to examine connections between female bodies, biotechnologies, work and art. Her essay 'Where is the Feminism in Cyberfeminism' promotes a cyberfeminist politics of practice using the Internet.[72] Whilst Wilding argues that the Internet possesses the potential to connect a diversity of female artists, activists, theorists and "women computer users (including teleworkers and keystrokers)" she also stresses the limitations of online connection.[73] For Wilding cyber(cultural)space is a useful and innovative space enabling collaborative projects amongst physically dispersed participants. Despite this positive enabling of connectivity Wilding writes that online communication does not facilitate the level of intimacy or questioning appraisal enjoyed at RL meetings.

Feminist Rosi Braidotti also strikes a cautionary note about cyber(cultural)space as well as attempting to embrace the possibilities of the Web. In her essay 'Cyberfeminism with a Difference' Braidotti underlines the lag between the narratives of transcendence and utopia that surround cyberspace and the realities of the domain that is still grounded in raced, classed, and gendered realities.[74] To combat this gap between possibility and actuality Braidotti, like a number of cyberfeminists such as Dale Spender, suggests that a strong female presence in cyberspace is needed. However, Braidotti, like Haraway, advocates irony and self-humour as intrinsic aspects of a contemporary cyberfeminist project. In order to think through the complexities of twenty-first century cyberculture, Braidotti argues, gender, race, and class need to be re-examined and re-worked. Braidotti writes:

> Feminist women have a long history of dancing through a variety of potentially lethal mine fields in their pursuit of socio-symbolic justice. Nowadays, women have to undertake the dance through cyberspace, if only to make sure that the joy-sticks of the cyberspace cowboys will not reproduce univocal phallicity under the mask of multiplicity ... [75]

One of the common concerns of cyberfeminist writing interrogates the imbrication of body, identity and technology. To feminists like Plant, Braidotti and VNS Matrix, who generally embrace contemporary technological advancements,

---

[71] VNS Matrix Website available at http://sysx.org/vns/, date accessed 6/5/05.

[72] Wilding, 'Where is the Feminism in Cyberfeminism?

[73] Ibid.

[74] Rosi Braidotti, 'Cyberfeminism with a Difference', available at http://www.let.uu.nl/womens_studies/rosi/cyberfem.htm#par5, date accessed 20/12/05.

cyber(cultural)space contains the potential for women to create their own bodies, realities and identities as well as the possibility of shifting beyond rigid gender demarcations in order to explore feminine embodiment. Braidotti posits that in cyber(cultural)space female bodies are not located in biology but are sites of multiple and continual "inscriptions of social codes".[76] Like Plant and the VNS Matrix, Braidotti argues that women must travel through and inhabit cyberspace in order to prevent re-animations of the conventionally gendered body.

But does this liberatory potential of cyber(cultural)space also encompass maternal bodies? While there is a general lack of feminist writing on this topic those texts that do explore this field tend to focus on techno-medical or parenting issues.[77] It is not surprising that in the cyber-realm, which is still a relatively new domain, that these topics are key areas of cyberfeminist investigation as techno-medicine and parenting concerns are already investigated by significant numbers of hard copy feminist academic and mainstream publications. The contribution of my thesis to cyber-feminist theory is to go some way to addressing this lack and examine meetings of maternity and cybertechnologies in areas of cyber(cultural)space not usually explored.

Methodology

Having mapped the contemporary terrain of maternity and an overview of cyberspace I turn to a brief discussion of my methodology in this thesis. To investigate the cyber-presence of maternal bodies I employ four methods. First, I employ a feminist frame of critical engagement to examine the cyber-texts. The second methodology I use to explore websites owes a debt to Christine Hine's "virtual ethnography" – sustained and deep involvement with and analysis of online interactions and the meanings generated from the resulting connections and disconnections.[78] My approach is more selective than a general ethnographic methodology as I limit the range of examples

---

[75] Ibid.

[76] Braidotti, 'Cyberfeminism with a Difference'.

[77] For just two examples of this small field see Sarah Stewart, *The Use of Internet Resources by Midwives in New Zealand*, A thesis submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (Applied) in Midwifery, Victoria University of Wellington, 2001, available in pdf online, date accessed 24/7/09. And Clare Madge and Henrietta O'Connor, 'Parenting Gone Wired: Empowerment of New Mothers on the Internet?' *Social & Cultural Geography*, 7, 2 (2006), pp. 199-220.

and use some retrospective material from website archives.[79] This approach enables me to focus on three samples of different types of online maternity sites rather than becoming lost amongst the plethora of maternal Web pages in cyber(cultural)space. I discuss my level of involvement in the maternity websites more in Chapter Three.

My engagement with cyber(cultural)space, however, is not only with websites I also examine an innovative CD ROM and intriguing techno-artworks. These explorations are also conducted from the viewpoints of academic examinations as well as personal pleasure. In order to explore these sites of cyber-maternal presence the second and third methods of investigation I use rely upon textual analysis. I employ discourse analysis and semiotic analysis in order to access the epistemological and ontological assumptions attached to the texts. In my analyses of the cyber-texts I examine the ways in which maternal bodies are described, shaped, and constructed in cyber(cultural)space, considering which mother voices are included or excluded and which versions of mothering are valued or dismissed.

Structure of Thesis

In order to investigate constructions of maternity in cyber(cultural)space I first explore some key feminist theorisations of maternal bodies. I begin with Adrienne Rich's notion of maternity as divided into institution and experience as a pivotal moment in feminist interrogations of maternal bodies and end with feminist investigations of mothering and technology that focus on issues of reproductive technologies. In between I cover a range of maternity literature including psychoanalytical feminist investigations and explorations of embodied mothering as well as writings concerning classed, raced and feminist maternal bodies. All of these investigations seek to challenge conventional narratives of motherhood.

Beginning with the dimension most readily identified in the popular imaginary with cyber(cultural)space in Chapter Three I examine maternal Web pages and the

---

[78] Christine Hine, *Virtual Ethnography*, (London: Sage Publications, Ltd, 2000).

[79] For an outline of the limited sample ethnography see David J. Phillips, 'Defending the Boundaries: Identifying and Countering Threats in a Usenet Newsgroup', *The Information Society*, 12, 1, (1996), pp.39-62, 1996. On retrospective analysis see Alan Aycock and Norman Buchignani, "The Email Murders: Reflections on 'Dead' Letters'. In *Cybersociety: Computer-Mediated Communication and Community*, edited by Stephen G. Jones, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995), pp. 184-231.

communities they produce. After spending a considerable amount of time browsing maternity websites I decided to divide the texts into three categories – commercial, humorous, and alternative. From these groups I have chosen sites which I argue are representative of the categories. Due to the enormous, and ever-increasing, number of commercial maternity websites I have chosen three from this category whereas I investigate one e-text from the humorous and alternative categories. The first section of Chapter Three outlines some of the theory investigating print magazines, other publications and technologies. In the next section I examine three commercial maternity sites - *BabyCenter, Maternity Mall,* and *American Baby.* I explore the ways in which the maternal bodies constructed by this group of websites that I call the Buy-Right Mums are located in matrices of consumption, surveillance and the commodification of the pregnant and maternal body.

The second online community I investigate is called the *Bad Mothers Club* (subsequently referred to as *BMC*). I examine this website's use of humour to puncture normative representations of maternity especially images of Proper/Good, Super and Yummy Mums. Thirdly, I examine *Hip Mama,* a self-proclaimed alternative website that, like *BMC,* critiques discourses of conventional maternity. Although *Hip Mama* is not without its humorous moments, it does not rely on humour to transgress dominant discourses. In this section I interrogate the ways in which *Hip Mama* subverts and yet, at times, reinstates narratives of traditional motherhood as the community members attempt to write a feisty political maternity.

The thesis then turns to two sites of cyber-culture where maternity has not thus far been the focus of critical discussion. In Chapter Four I look with great pleasure to Shelley Jackson's widely distributed CD ROM, *Patchwork Girl.* The focus of discussion about this cyber-feminist re-working of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is its construction of maternity as hybrid, monstrous, fragmented and queer. I argue that *Patchwork Girl* enacts explorations of the monstrous maternal - historically, the site of the other, embodiment, agency and pleasure. I consider *Patchwork Girl* in terms of the text's resistance to discourses of conventional maternity which is chiefly tied to two aspects of the multi-media artwork. First, I examine the threads of the monstrous maternal which are integral to the text. Second, I investigate the ways in which the structures and capabilities of the fluid medium of electronic text enable

reader/interactors concerned with *Patchwork Girl* to saunter away from normative images and concepts of motherhood.

Shifting further along the spectrum of cyber(cultural)space in Chapter Five the thesis visits another location where narratives of mothering have not so far been examined in any depth – the art gallery displaying technologically infused artworks. In this chapter I focus on the works of acclaimed Australian multi-media artist Patricia Piccinini. I argue that her art work demonstrates a techno-maternity that meshes flows of maternal bodies and new technologies. In this chapter I investigate how Piccinini conducts both subversions and reinscriptions of conventional tropes of mothering by the infusion of a monstrous techno-maternity in her installations. Her work inspires multiple readings and my discussion of her artwork teases out the complex possibilities of the monstrosity through which it constructs techno-maternities.

In this thesis I consider several questions regarding cybermaternity. Are cybermaternal bodies importations of conventional discourses of motherhood from RL? Is the average cybermother a re-presentation of the stereotype of the mother as white, western middle-class, and heterosexual? Is it possible, amongst the websites saturated with commerce and convention to construct images of maternity that are alternatives to commodity-driven and traditional depictions of motherhood? Do monstrous representations of cybermaternal bodies automatically challenge conventional representations of mothering? It must be noted that the cyberbodies of maternity under consideration present only a trace of the plethora of cybermaternal bodies who inhabit cyper(cultural)spaces. From this glimpse into maternal cyberculture, my exploration tracks cybermaternal bodies that attract, repel and rework conventional images of maternal bodies. The actions of attraction, rejection, and reworking, sometimes within the one text, present a maternity that is fragmented, situated, and lived rhizomatically.

Chapter 2
Maternal Bodies – The Academy Writes Around

As I plug in my ideas and get wired up in readiness for an investigation of cybermaternities I draw upon a number of theorists and texts that examine maternity. First, I explore feminist re-examinations of maternity that occur during the 1970s. This is an important starting point as many of the arguments central to the theory that I examine from this period are still relevant to feminist critiques of maternity today which respond to those of the earlier era. For instance, feminist/poet Adrienne Rich's famous definition of motherhood as both experience and institution has become accepted as a fundamentally important notion which serves as a basis for other theorisations of mothering.[1] From these classic moments of second wave feminist theory I then look to subsequent theorisations of maternity in psychoanalytical feminist thought that attempt to move away from traditional notions of the maternal. I investigate the theories of psychoanalytical feminists as their examinations of maternity shift the focus of interrogation in this area from social and cultural structures and concerns to a more literary analysis of the inner workings of maternal bodies and their creative writings. The theorisations of Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous feature in this section. My brief exploration of some of the ideas of the psychoanalytical feminists supports one of the main areas of examination of this thesis – the ways in which maternal bodies who challenge traditional narratives are both written and write themselves.

Moving from the psychic to the material body I explore some feminist notions of maternal embodiment. Kristeva suggests ways of moving beyond conventional motherhood by challenging binaries of nature/culture as well as juxtaposing theory about mothering and personal experience of maternity in a similar way to Rich's text. I look to these stories of embodied mothering as they are examples of different types of subversive maternity narratives that my thesis aims to discuss. Then, I investigate mothering as the site of resistance and the locus of desire as mediated by race, class, and sexuality. These examinations of maternal difference are vitally important to my

---

[1] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: Virago, 1979).

project as they demonstrate the constructedness of idealized notions of universal motherhood and offer other kinds of maternity stories that are outside normative narratives. Finally, I consider feminist interactions with technological advancements in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and the resultant intersections of maternity and technology.

Discussions concerning mothering and reproductive technologies as well as those involving maternity and cyber/digital technologies tend to raise similar issues. These two areas of enquiry often debate whether maternity and contemporary technologies are forces that are oppositional or complementary in the liberatory potential possessed by technology. Many of the cybermaternities that I investigate in this thesis hinge upon the joining of maternity and reproductive technologies. I argue that the often-problematic relationship between technology and maternity is a fertile area for the examination of possible representations of maternal bodies that subvert the limitations of conventional depictions of motherhood.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to deal in any depth with all of the theories and texts that explore mothering. Thus, I construct an overview selection of key feminist writings on these fields of enquiry. I focus on those particular feminist theorists in this chapter which are all, in their different ways, crucial to my thesis as it seeks out representations of maternity that critique conventional discourses of motherhood and seek ways of challenging traditional narratives of maternal bodies.

Early Second Wave Ideas

Feminist theorisations in 2009 owe a debt to the early second wave examinations of maternal bodies. Key ideas from this time period underlie much of the current maternal scholarship. Throughout the early 1970s, the feminist movement and compulsory motherhood are defined in almost direct opposition to each other. Feminist thinking on this topic ranges through a number of different approaches. Kate Millet in the classic feminist text, *Sexual Politics*, argues that the mother's "place" within the family is a source of oppression for women.[2] British sociologist Lee Comer

---

[2] Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1971).

rejects the structure of the male-dominated nuclear family.[3] Another British sociologist Sally Macintyre challenges the tenet of conventional maternity that defines women's desire to become a mother as an instinctual longing.[4] Macintyre alongside American literary critic Carolyn Heilbrun and another feminist writer from the United States, Linda Gordon, writes of motherhood as a construct that restricts and controls women.[5]

In 1970s feminist theory women's reproductive capabilities are generally perceived to be the immutable difference between women and men. In a reaction against the naturalisation of motherhood and the description of maternity as the ultimate female function, feminist theorist Shulamith Firestone posits that this capacity for reproduction is a site of oppression for women.[6] Firestone, one of the first feminists to embrace the possibilities of technology concerning women's reproductive capabilities, argues that before the advent of the contraceptive pill women were unable to control their powers of reproduction. Culturally imposed restrictions concerning child care ensures that women are accorded the position of primary carer to children who contemporary society views as heavily dependent on a mother's care for a significant period of time. According to Firestone, this division of labour produces distinctions regarding work and a caste system based on biology. Thus, Firestone frames these issues of gendered divisions of child care and domestic tasks in terms of political problems. In order to overcome what Firestone perceives as the twin sources of oppression stemming from biologically based distinctions – marriage and motherhood - she argues in favour of a women-centred technology. Firestone claims that women could only be liberated from "the tyranny of their biology" by harnessing reproductive technology.[7] According to Firestone, women's access to artificial means

---

3 Lee Comer, *The Myth of Motherhood*, (Nottingham: The Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, Spokesman Pamphlett, 1971).

4 Sally Macintyre, 'Who Wants Babies? The Social Construction of Instincts' in *Sexual Divisions and Society: Process and Change* edited by Diana Leonard, Diana Barker and Sheila Allen (London: Tavistock Publications, 1976), pp. 150- 173.

5 Macintyre, Ibid. Carolyn Heilbrun, *Reinventing Womanhood*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979). Linda Gordon, *Woman's Body, Woman's Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America*, (New York: Grossman/Viking, 1978).

6 Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970).

7 Ibid, p. 238.

of giving birth would liberate them from the trauma of childbirth and abolish the gendered biological division of labour.

Of Woman Born

In the context of 1970s feminism, then, motherhood is a problematic proposition.[8] Writing as a mother, Adrienne Rich's analysis of maternity offers a recuperation of motherhood. The division of motherhood into institution and personal possibility in her book *Of Woman Born* (1979) enables Rich's investigation to describe both the potential power in the lived experience and the dominant discourses that circulate around maternity in a capitalist patriarchy. Rich states that

> I try to distinguish between two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that that potential – and all women – shall remain under male control.[9]

While Rich acknowledges the importance of Shulamith Firestone's notion of "artificial reproduction" in the critiquing of masculinist framings of traditional motherhood, she argues against the former feminist's concept of a purely technological means of reproduction. Rich's theoretical position clearly delineates what she perceives to be the difference between mothering as lived experience and motherhood as defined by the limitations of capitalist-patriarchal forces. She posits that Firestone's technophillic version of reproduction ironically produces a replication of masculinist dominant discourses of childbirth. Thus, Rich states that

> Firestone sees childbearing ... as purely and simply the victimizing experience it has often been under patriarchy. "Pregnancy is barbaric," she declares; "Childbirth *hurts* ..." Her attitudes toward pregnancy ("the

---

[8] See: Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born,* p. 13. See also: Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977). Nancy B. Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). Jane Lazarre, The Mother Knot (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976). Nancy Friday, *My Mother/My Self* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1977). Jane Flax, "The Conflict Between Nurturance and Autonomy in Mother-Daughter Relationships and Within Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 4, no. 2 (June 1978), pp. 171-189; the entire issure of this journal is devoted to "a feminist theory of motherhood". Sara Ruddick, "Maternal Thinking" *Feminist Studies* 6, no. 2. (Summer 1980), pp.342-67.

[9] Rich, *Of Woman Born,* 13.

husband's guilty waning of sexual desire; the woman's tears in front of the mirror at eight months") are male derived. [10]

According to Rich, a woman's decision concerning child bearing should centre around choice: between biological and artificial means as well the ultimate question of whether to have children at all. For Rich, Firestone's theorisation of motherhood does not investigate the complexities of the interconnections involving pain, isolation, pleasure and sensuality. Without a full analysis of maternity, Rich argues, women are unable to go beyond the current issues and shift into a more equitable future.

Rich's exploration of the traditional tropes and the experiences of motherhood reveals maternity to be an extremely complicated knot of events, experiences and emotions. On the one hand, motherhood is a "keystone of the most diverse social and political systems" of masculine control.[11] Yet, maternity as experience possesses the potential for joyful engagement with a mother's creativity. Therefore, Rich argues that the locus for women's limitation to traditional tropes of motherhood is not in their capacity for reproduction but in the incorporation of maternity into political and social networks of male power. The destruction of these webs of power would, according to Rich, transform motherhood into a fulfilling and deliberately chosen career.

Indeed, Rich's description of motherhood as constrained by masculine tradition offers the hopeful acknowledgement that some power continues to move within the limitations placed upon maternity. She states that "What is astonishing ... is all that we have managed to salvage, of ourselves, for our children, even within the destructiveness of the institution: the tenderness, the passion, the trust in our instincts, the evocation of a courage we did not know we owned ...".[12] Indeed, the identification of maternal resistance to masculine constraint is the cornerstone in Rich's conception of an empowered maternity. If the institution of motherhood could be annihilated, Rich argues, then a new feminine consciousness could emerge which abolishes malestream binaries of mind/body and inner/outer, thus, freeing women to discover the potential buried within their physiologies. She wrote:

In arguing that we have by no means yet explored or understood our biological grounding, the miracle and paradox of the female body and its

---

[10] Rich, *Of Woman Born*, p. 174, quoting Firestone's *Dialectic of Sex*, pp. 198 – 99.

[11] Rich, *Of Woman Born*, p. 13.

[12] Ibid., pp. 279-80.

> spiritual and political meanings, I am really asking whether women cannot begin, at last, to *think through the body*, to connect what has been so cruelly disorganized – our great mental capacities, hardly used; our highly developed tactile sense; our genius for close observation; our complicated, pain-enduring, multi-pleasured physicality [emphasis in the original].[13]

While Rich disavows the idea that women are innately morally superior to men, she places great faith in the notion that the "liberation" of women from patriarchal forces would unleash intensely positive and creative flows that are, in some way, undeniably feminine. This revolution would stem from a sense of choice about assuming the mantle of maternity. It would emerge from women themselves and be fuelled by their own experiences.

To me, reading Rich's text is a profoundly moving experience but I also wonder at the lack of engagement with maternity narratives of working-class women and women of colour. Rich's focus on white middle-class women renders women of colour, Indigenous women and working-class women invisible as it places the bourgeois white maternal body in the centre of discussion about maternity.[14] Over twenty years after *Of Woman Born* was published and in my own context, Rich's theory of motherhood is still being interrogated. Australian academic Aileen Moreton-Robinson critiques Rich's theorizations of maternity arguing that "She [Rich] asserts that motherhood as an institution underpins social and political systems, but she does not explicate which racialised forms of motherhood underpin which social and political systems. For her the normative form of motherhood is white motherhood."[15] In addition, while Rich argues that freely chosen childbirth could liberate women's deeply held creativity her discussions of late twentieth-century obstetrics and gynecology leaves aside the possible benefits of contemporary obstetrical science.

---

[13] Ibid., p. 284.

[14] For a small sample of criticisms made by women of colour concerning feminism as a white middle-class phenomenon see bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: from margin to center*, 2nd Ed., (London: Pluto Press, 2000); Patricia Hill Collins, 'Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorising About Motherhood', in *American Families: A Multicultural Reader*, edited by Stephanie Coontz, Maya Parson and Gabrielle Raley, (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 197- 217; and, for an Australian writer who draws attention to the whiteness of mainstream feminism Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' Up To The White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism*, (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 2000).

[15] Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' Up To The White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism*, (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 2000), pp. 40-41.

Despite these criticisms of Rich's book it is undoubtedly one of the crucially important texts amongst scholarly investigations of maternity. Canadian academic Andrea O'Reilly argues that it is Rich's division of maternity into restrictive institution and potentially liberating experience that enables feminist scholarship to move beyond the notion that mothering is always irrevocably oppressive for women.[16] The idea of the inevitable oppressiveness of motherhood that marks some of the second wave feminist thinking obscures the liberatory possibilities of mothering for women. As O'Reilly states "while motherhood, as an institution, is a male-defined site of oppression, women's own experiences of mothering can nonetheless be a source of power."[17] According to O'Reilly, "in interrupting and deconstructing the patriarchal narrative of motherhood, Rich destabilized the hold this discourse has on the meaning and practice of mothering and cleared the space for the articulation of counternarratives of mothering".[18] While this "interruption" has inspired numerous examinations detailing the harmfulness of the masculinist institution of motherhood, investigations of feminist narratives of empowered maternity, like O'Reilly's *Mother Outlaws* and *Feminist Mothering*, are just beginning to be written.[19] I will return to O'Reilly later in this chapter.

Psychoanalytical Feminisms

Moving from feminist interrogations of maternity that concentrate on social structures and cultural issues I next explore the theorisations of mothering from the standpoint of psychoanalytical feminisms that examine the psychic maternal body. The work of the psychoanalytical feminists offers some examples of women writing about maternal subjectivity untied from discourses of the natural and the conventional. These are the types of maternal bodies that I seek to investigate in this thesis.

Psychoanalytical feminist engagements with maternity in the late 1970s, 1980s and 1990s attempt to challenge and go beyond conventional representations of the maternal. Dorothy Dinnerstein's work diverges from 1970s feminist theorisations of

---

[16] Andrea O'Reilly, *Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering*, (Toronto: Women's Press, 2004), pp. 2-3.

[17] Ibid, p. 2.

[18] Andrea O'Reilly, ed, *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), p. 10.

[19] Ibid. See also O'Reilly, *Feminist Mothering*, (New York: SUNY Press, 2008).

mothering that generally refuse any currency to Freudian and post-Freudian thought.[20] Dinnerstein's work differs from that of Millett and Firestone in that she derives her theoretical base from Freudian and Gestalt traditions of psychoanalysis. The cornerstone of Dinnerstein's theory is that adult consciousness is shaped by the experiences of infancy and the fact that most infants' primary care givers are women. She contends that children associate women, in general, and mothers specifically with the powerful and often irrational fears and needs of infancy. Like British feminist psychoanalyst Melanie Klein,[21] Dinnerstein argues that the mother inevitably could not satisfy all of the infant's desires. According to Dinnerstein children fantasize a mother who is completely responsive to all their desires and then, as adults express their anger and disappointment at the inability of the mother to attain those unrealistic standards. In Dinnerstein's interpretation of family dynamics girls, due to their possible future involvement in mothering, fear maternal power less than boys. Thus, Dinnerstein states that it is the repressed male fear of the mother/woman that fuels the misogyny, violence directed against women and the close identification of men with technology – defined against maternity/femininity - prevalent in western culture.

Just as Rich and Dinnerstein, in their own particular areas, formulate fresh theories regarding motherhood, American sociologist, psychoanalyst and educator Nancy Chodorow offers a new perspective on feminist theories of maternity. Writing in the late 1970s, Chodorow refutes both the traditional notion of mothering as an innate, biologically-driven urge and the conventional feminist perception that women are coerced into motherhood by patriarchal ideology and power. Chodorow draws upon object-relations theory and, in particular, D.W. Winnicott's notion of "good-enough mothering" in which he argues that this kind of mother continually adapts to the infant's needs so that the child grows and matures without "anxieties and conflicts".[22]

---

[20] Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise*, (New York: Harpercollins, 1976),

[21] Melanie Klein (1882-1960) sought to extend Freud's originial Object Relations Theory through her observations and clinical work with children. Klein's work challenged orthodox Freudian work and eventuated in the split between what became known as her London School and the Viennese School associated with Anna Freud. Klein's influential works include *Contributions to Psycho-Analysis, 1921-1945* (London: Hogarth Press, 1948) and *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, Third Edition, (London: Hogarth Press and the Insitute of Psycho-Analysis, 1949).

[22] For discussion of the "good enough mother" see D.W. Winnicott, 'Primary Maternal Pre-Occupation', *Collected Papers: Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis*, (London: Tavistock, [1956], 1958), p. 300.

Incorporating Winnicott's theory into her theorisations, Chodorow asks the question, "Why did women decide to become mothers?" According to Chodorow, women rather than men mother because the widely divergent pre-Oedipal experiences of boys and girls fosters female subjects who are psychologically suited to mothering. As a result of this psychological definition, Chodorow argues, a chain of cause and effect results in the situation where women are drawn to motherhood which sets up a sexualised division of labour which, in turn, contributes to the continuing universal oppression of the feminine.

Despite a general concurrence amongst Firestone, Dinnerstein, and Chodorow about the oppressive qualities of motherhood, their definitions of the actual situation of mothering vary. Firestone describes maternity as painful biological mess – constriction by means of flesh and blood that is but is not your own. Dinnerstein theorises mothering from the child's viewpoint as expressions of capricious and unpredictable maternal power provoking unappeasable adult rage. From Chodorow's viewpoint, maternity is a seductively appealing location of connectedness and love that is, ultimately, stifling and oppressive. While Firestone turns to technology as a solution to the problematics of mothering, both Dinnerstein and Chodorow argue that equal parenting is the answer to these issues. Through her work, Chodorow envisages a world where men and women assume equal parenting duties which results in the eradication of gender inequalities and the transformation of the socialization of male and female subjects.

From the other side of the Atlantic and from a European intellectual tradition the French feminist psychoanalytical writers Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous approach the notion of maternity differently to the psychoanalytical feminists from the United States. Irigaray and Cixous argue that female desire, sexuality, and voice are subsumed under the image of the mother whose productivity is tied to the bearing and raising of children. According to Irigaray "the idea has been introduced in women's imagination that their pleasure lies in 'producing' children: which amounts to bending them to the values of production, even before they have had an occasion to examine their pleasure".[23] Thus, she posits that women's sexuality, desire and agency are roped

---

See also D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, (London: Tavistock, 1971).

[23] Luce Irigaray, "Women's Exile", trans. C. Venn, *Ideology and Consciousness* 1 (Spring) 1977, pp. 62-76, p. 66.

to their reproductive potential. In a culture that is grounded in phallocentrism and capitalism, productivity rather than reproduction is valued. Irigaray states that western culture's ambivalent attitude to women is illustrated in the opposing archetypes of the asexual mother of Christ, the Madonna and the sexual temptress, Eve. These representations underline the cultural message that women gain societal approval only as the passive and long-suffering mother. Therefore, the female can be a mother or a sexualised woman such as the femme fatale but not a mother-woman.

Irigaray posits that in order to attain autonomous subject positions women need to move beyond the restrictions of male-prescribed maternity.[24] Unlike Simone de Beauvoir, the French feminists' predecessor, and Firestone, however, Irigaray does not argue that women need to reject motherhood.[25] Instead, she contends that for all women, especially mothers, the maternal function must not be permitted to obscure their feminine subjectivities. Therefore, Irigaray describes the feminine as always in excess of the maternal.

Hélène Cixous contends that the total rejection of the maternal as an option for women is also a constriction of female potentiality.[26] Cixous plays with metaphorical and literal traces of maternity throughout her work. She posits that the maternal body is a metaphor for literary creation: productions that fracture phallocentric concepts of linearity and rationality by the saturation of forces of sexuality and excess. Cixous argues that by the simple act of writing, women will destroy the Oedipal narrative that confines them within the single and passive role of mother. Her body of work, using what she terms "the mother's white ink", enacts performances of feminine flesh, writing, voice and desire:

> Text: my body ... What touches you, the equivoice that affects you, fills your breast with an urge to come to language and launches your force; the

---

[24] For a discussion of Luce Irigaray's theories of maternity see *The Irigaray Reader* edited by Margaret Whitford, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, [1991], 1995), pp. 25-29.

[25] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Translated and edited by H.M Parshley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1953), pp. 71-74.

[26] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born,* p. 40; Helene Cixous, "Laugh of the Medusa", translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, Vol 1, no. 4, 1976, pp. 875-93; and, Kristeva, "Motherhood according to Giovanni Bellini" in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, edited by Leon Roudiez, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 241-242 and "Stabat Mater" in *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives* edited by Susan Rubin Suleiman, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 99-118.

> rhythm that laughs you; the intimate recipient who makes all metaphors possible and desirable; body (body? Bodies?), no more describable than god, the soul, or the Other; that part of you that leaves a space between yourself and urges you to inscribe in language your woman's style. [27]

According to Cixous "a woman is never far from 'mother' ... There is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink". [28]

Julia Kristeva's work concerning maternal bodies emphasizes their implication in narratives of convention as well as their potential for subversion. She posits that the maternal body is traditionally written about rather than being the writer of her own story. Her essays, "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini" (1975) and "Stabat Mater" (1976), however, are written about the time she herself was pregnant and gave birth to her son. In these texts Kristeva theorises mothering as a "double" discourse of negative and positive elements.[29] It is exactly this doubleness, Kristeva argues, that western discourses of maternity gloss over. The representation of Mother that is available to western culture through religious, artistic and scientific discourses lacks both the *jouissance* and the pain of the maternal.[30] In her examinations of religious representations of maternity in "Stabat Mater" Kristeva posits that the myth of the Virgin Mary is no longer a potent means of interpretation and explanation of mothering. Kristeva proposes the need for a new imagery and mythology of maternity that includes the ambivalence and negativity that is absent from conventional representations of mothering such as the Virgin Mary. In *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989), Kristeva identifies depression and melancholia as the outcomes of a prolonged alignment with archaic constructions of maternity.[31]

In *Tales of Love* (1986) Kristeva notes that the maternal body is the central figure in discourses concerning the notion of love which includes courtly love literature, narcissism, and sublimity.[32] Narratives of "maternal love" have the potential to contain

---

[27] Cixous, "Laugh of the Medusa", *op.cit*, p. 882.

[28] Ibid., p.881.

[29] Kristeva, "Motherhood according to Giovanni Bellini" and "Stabat Mater".

[30] Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-bind* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993).

[31] Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

[32] Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

the mother within restrictive concepts of self-sacrifice and acquiescence. Conversely, in *Powers of Horror* (1982) Kristeva posits that the maternal is closely associated with the abject – that which disgusts, repels and fascinates. According to Kristeva the child must abject the maternal body in order to attain autonomy. This process of abjection occurs as the child weans and separates from the mother. The desire to abject the maternal is also accompanied by an understanding of the enormity of this task. Due to this abjection of the maternal body the mother herself becomes abject.[33] As well as its association with disgust, repulsion and fear the abject also transgresses boundaries and rules offering the possibilities for overturning conventions.

For Kristeva the mother is the pre-linguistic body, a split subject who is present and absent; phallic and castrated; and, powerful and powerless. This conceptualization has become a metaphor for feminine subversion amongst feminist psychoanalytical and literary theorists.[34] According to Kristeva, the maternal body threatens the realm of the Symbolic in two ways. Her potential to overcome the Otherness that defines the female against the male subject lies in the abundance of maternal *jouissance.* Mother figures also represent as well as embody a "fold" between nature and culture that refuses inclusion by the Symbolic:

> ... no signifier can uplift it (the maternal body) without leaving a remainder, for the signifier is always meaning, communication, or structure, whereas a woman as mother would be, instead, a strange fold that changes culture into nature, speaking into biology. Although it concerns every women's body, the heterogeneity that cannot be subsumed in the signifier nevertheless explodes violently with pregnancy (the threshold of culture and nature) and the child's arrival. [35]

The conceptualization of the mother as operating between culture and nature rejects traditional narratives that reduce the maternal body to the natural. And so Kristeva is enabled to write of the mother as a speaking subject. Kristeva's mobilization of the notion of the maternal body as the other-within serves as a model for her theorisations of subjectivity. Kristeva argues that all of us are, like the maternal body, subjects-in-process always concerned with the other-within.

---

[33] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia Universsity Press, 1982).

[34] Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 171-173.

[35] Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater", p. 259.

Kristeva writes full and rich accounts of her own experiences of maternity that incorporate a range of experiences outside conventional representations of motherhood. In Kristeva's juxtaposition of theorisations of maternity with descriptions of her own experiences of pregnancy and childbirth, lies the potential for new ways of describing the corporeality, experiences and psychic life of maternal subjectivity. Two aspects of Kristeva's work, however, limit this possibility for subversion. She tends to conflate the pregnant body and the maternal body which restricts her theorisations to biological maternity. Kristeva also does not extend her analysis of maternity to include context based specificities of the lived experiences of mothers. Her project still places the mother – usually written in the singular – in the position of white educated middle-class women. In these strengths and flaws Kristeva's project is similar to Rich's poetic and pragmatic writing of maternity which also focuses on white mothering to the exclusion of mothers of colour.

Embodied Maternity

Nevertheless I pursue narratives of subversive maternity found where maternal bodies write their own stories of *embodiment*. The poetic focus on the pregnant body that Kristeva writes is echoed in the work of philosopher Iris Marion Young. Writing over ten years after much of Kristeva's initial theorisations of the maternal body in the 1970s, Young also begins with the observation that the topic of maternity is generally written *about* rather than spoken *by* the maternal subject. Her description of the pregnant woman identifies a decentred or "doubled" subject.[36] Young posits that

> The pregnant subject ... experiences her body as herself and not herself. Its inner movements belong to another being yet they are not other ... the woman can experience an innocent narcissism fed by recollection of her repressed experience of her mother's body. Pregnant existence entails ... a unique temporality of process and growth in which the woman can experience herself as split between past and future.[37]

Young writes *as* and *through* the body of the (expectant) mother. From her exploration of the silencing and desexualisation of the mother, Young avoids the trap of obscuring motherhood behind a series of metaphors that are intended to deny the

---

[36] Iris Marion Young, "Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation" in *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 46-61, p. 160.

[37] Ibid., pp. 46-47.

maternal subjectivity, voice and agency. Thus, Young's sensuous writings can be described as a "mother's discourse". [38]

Kristeva and Young are two of the leading feminist theorists who have produced key feminist texts concerning embodied maternity. Ten years after Young's landmark work on this topic maternal embodiment is still an issue being explored in the contemporary writings of Australian feminists Alison Bartlett and Fiona Giles. These writers focus on a relatively new topic of consideration within examinations of maternity: breastfeeding. The physicality of breastfeeding bodies describes and interrogates some of the contradictions and stereotypes that still haunt contemporary maternities. Fiona Giles states in her book *Fresh Milk: The Secret Life of Breasts* "the details of how we fit breastfeeding into our lives, or decide that it doesn't fit, are not well known. And the meaning of breastfeeding – as opposed to its nutritional content – is rarely discussed outside mothers groups and paediatricians' waiting rooms".[39] *Fresh Milk*'s examination of the breastfeeding body presents some of the difficulties, pleasures and anxieties involved with this practice. Each essay in the text supports Giles' argument "that breastfeeding, though a function of the body, is deeply embedded in cultural practice".[40] Giles uses narratives of wet-nursing, cross-nursing, adoptive or 'surrogate' nursing and breastmilk donation in order to disentangle the notion of breastfeeding from its current enmeshment in webs of biological/physiological acts and "natural" genetic maternity. In doing so, the essays in *Fresh Milk* show maternal bodies to be clothed in investments concerning different types of maternal identities which render those materialities permeable or not permeable to various 'truths' or stereotypes of mothering.

Academic Alison Bartlett also interrogates breastfeeding practices, cultures and bodies.[41] In thoughtful and carefully crafted essays, books and articles Bartlett skilfully draws together threads of personal experience, theory and original analysis to think about breastfeeding and wonder whether we are able to think through breasted

---

[38] Michelle Boulous Walker, *Philosophy And The Maternal Body Reading Silence* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 149- 150.

[39] Fiona Giles, *Fresh Milk The Secret Life of Breasts*, (Australia: Allen and Unwin, 2003), p. xi

[40] Ibid, p. 15.

experience. In the essay 'Thinking Through Breasts', Bartlett draws on the work of feminist scholars Adrienne Rich and Jane Gallop which argues for the recognition and academic interrogation of the specificities of female embodiment.[42] In her book *Breastwork: Rethinking Breastfeeding* Bartlett writes a poetic of breastfeeding story and analysis that seeks to uncouple the traditional roping of this act to nature and biology.[43] In place of this conventional reading, Bartlett argues that it is more useful to think of breastfeeding in terms of performance. She writes,

> Instead of being 'natural', I propose that breastfeeding can more productively be read as performative: as an act that we do, either consciously or unconsciously, as part of our cultural negotiation of gender. Thinking about breastfeeding as being performed enables me to attend to the competing and contradictory meanings of breastfeeding that are considered in how we breastfeed in different times, places and with variously aged babies.[44]

Bartlett's work articulates a number of positions experienced by breastfeeding bodies. She writes her own experiences alongside explorations of the breastfeeding body in relation to discourses of media, medicine, maternity, sexuality and race. Bartlett's inclusion of her own voice in the text contributes to the presentation of breastfeeding as a joyous, calming, nurturing, painful and potentially boring experience. This expressed diversity enables the text to move beyond subscribing to the strident advocacy of the currently popular model of "breast is best" maternity to a more nuanced interrogation of breastfeeding as a cultural practice and performance. Bartlett's untying the bonds that rope breastfeeding and women's bodies to the "natural" is extremely useful for feminist analysis and also serves in breaking down still cherished notions of a mind/body binary. She achieves this undoing by using a range of examples from western art, public debate concerning lactation and women's own writing about their breastfeeding experiences.

---

[41] For further discussions of breastfeeding bodies see 'Meanings of Breastmilk: New Feminist Perspectives', *Australian Feminist Studies*, edited by Alison Bartlett and Fiona Giles, Vol. 19, No. 43, November 2004.

[42] Alison Bartlett, 'Thinking Through Breasts', in *Fresh Milk: the Secret Life of Breasts*, by Fiona Giles, pp. 151-61.

[43] Alison Bartlett, *Breastwork: Rethinking Breastfeeding*, (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2005).

[44] Ibid, p. 5.

Just as Alison Bartlett unties binary couplings of mind/body and breast/nature, her work also shifts maternal bodies from containment within dominant discourses of sexuality and race. Whilst Bartlett seeks to remove boundaries that separate maternity and sexuality she also carefully examines this topic, demonstrating the controversy that surrounds the issue. In order to do this she frames her discussion of maternal sexuality around the case of a United States mother, Karen Carter who called a helpline in 1991 wanting to discuss her feelings of sexual arousal when she breastfed her child.[45] Concerned about what she perceived to be the potential for sexual abuse the volunteer who answered the call contacted the police. As a result of intervention by police and the Department of Social Services (DSS) the child was placed in protective custody for over a year. This case shows the shifting terrain of moral panic that could be mobilized when women's bodies, maternity, and sexuality do not follow conventional scripts.

Karen Carter's case is similar to other United States court-based interventions in the breastfeeding relationship between mother and child.[46] In this sense it summons the spectre of impropriety in breastfeeding - the breast is continually constructed as sexualised object - that seems to continually trouble the popular consciousness of Western culture. The tension between the perception of breasts as sexual and breastfeeding as a natural phenomena overflows, at times, into legislature. For instance, the laws of some American states stipulate that citizens have the "right to breastfeed" in public whereas other states are blocked from introducing similar legislation by intense lobbying. In addition, the charges of sexual abuse held against Carter and the extreme difficulties she experienced in attempting to extricate herself from the surveillance of the DSS are not peculiar to her case. Furthermore, the volunteer's over-reaction to the mention of the troubled constellation of single-mother, sexuality, desire and breastfeeding mirrors the widely held cultural assumption enshrined in legal code that mothers and sexual activity are mutually exclusive.[47] All of these threads in Karen Carter's narrative combine to produce an image of the "bad"

---

[45] Ibid, pp. 97-99.

[46] Lauri Umansky, 'Breastfeeding in the 1990s: The Karen Carter Case and the Politics of Maternal Sexuality' in *"Bad" Mothers: The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America*, edited by Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky,pp. (New York: New York University Press, 1998), pp. 299-309.

[47] Umansky, "Breastfeeding in the 1990s", pp. 306-309.

mother who is defined in this way by a social order fraught with anxieties about the intermeshing of maternity, desire and sexuality.

Feminist investigations of breastfeeding bodies describe some of the difficulties in examining constellations of maternal bodies and sexuality. This scholarship also identifies and interrogates discourses of race and maternity. Turning to narratives of Indigenous Australian women, Alison Bartlett argues that "The meanings of maternity in Australia have been inflected by constructions of race since white contact".[48] Furthermore, Bartlett contends that the discourses of western medicine that often frame and fuel breastfeeding discussions assume whiteness to be the norm while being blind to the enmeshment of medical practise and practitioners in narratives of race.[49] Bartlett's interrogation of the intersections between Indigenous breastfeeding bodies and western medicine's constructions of breastfeeding acts emphasizes the importance of Indigenous beliefs and practices while also acknowledging the value of some western medical interventions. For instance, Indigenous breastfeeding mothers in some Indigenous communities who have difficulty with their milk supply take part in ritual smoking ceremonies rather than using a breastpump or breastfeeding more often which are the acts that western breastfeeding advocates recommend. These rituals are reported by the women concerned and health practitioners to have a high rate of success. Bartlett also notes that in certain Indigenous communities the combining of Aboriginal and western medical practices has contributed to higher numbers of mothers who have "successfully" breastfed their babies.[50] The stories of Indigenous breastfeeding mothers, often self-representations, create narratives that are as Bartlett writes "a very different version of the meta-narrative commonly available to white readers about racial predispositions and low breastfeeding rates, about non-compliance and vulnerability."[51]

---

[48] Alison Bartlett, 'Black Breasts, White Milk? Ways of Constructing Breastfeeding and Race in Australia', *Australian Feminist Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 45, November 2004, pp 341-355, p. 342.

[49] Bartlett, *Breastwork*, pp. 148-149.

[50] Ibid, p 151..

[51] Ibid ,p.158.

Other Mothers,

Alison Bartlett's interrogations of breastfeeding bodies permits the troubling of traditional constructions of maternity as white, western, heterosexual, married, and emptied of desire. But many of the previous feminist investigations of mothering assume a coherence concerning the state of maternity and then comment on difference. Other explorations of mothering, however, commence from the assumption that maternity is specified by sexuality, class and race.

The enmeshment of maternity and sexuality charges the terms "lesbian mother" and "lesbian parent" which emerged in the 1970s. American feminist Ellen Lewin's research, instigated in 1976, investigates the intersection of what is conventionally considered as separate spheres: mothering and lesbianism.[52] In these early narratives of lesbian mothering women chiefly relate their own experiences. The stories of some lesbian mothers quoted in Lewin's work suggest that they reconcile the social dichotomization of the terms "lesbian" and "mother" in claiming both within their own subjectivities. Conversely, other narratives in Lewin's publication reveal the perceived need to manage these discourses by separation, which, in turn leads to a further dichotomization. A substantial number of women Lewin interviewed state that their longing to invest themselves in the role of mother eclipses their desire to mark their sexual identity as lesbian. Some women even kept their lesbianism from their children fearing that the revelation of this aspect of their selves would be a terrible secret burden the child would have to bear. This choice of the maternal role in preference to the identification with lesbian identity attests to the powerful pervasiveness of traditional discourses of motherhood.

Lewin argues that for lesbians entering into mothering or maintaining maternal status requires agency. However, as a result of cultural assumptions concerning the *naturalness* of the desire for the maternal state, lesbians who become mothers are automatically endowed with at least a little of the aura of the normative. For lesbians, the act of becoming a mother invests the subject with the appearance of traditionally feminine desires – the urge to become a maternal body is popularly perceived as a normative longing. Dominant discourses also depict the maternal body as heterosexual. Thus, the traditional construction of the heterosexual mother tends to

veil lesbian mothers in assumptions of heterosexuality. Ironically, because the state of mothering exists within the realm of conventional expectations of women, Lewin contends that it has been perceived to be a site of lesbian accommodation of gendered normative behaviour.

As well as Lewin's research that draws on early accounts of lesbian mothers a considerable body of work on lesbian maternity in the 1970s focuses on issues of child custody and the politics of lesbian mothering.[53] Lesbian mothers in texts of the 1970s and 1980s are often depicted in defensive images: defending their right to mother.[54] Accused by dominant heterosexual discourses of sexual deviance, lesbian mothers fighting custody battles challenge the assumption that the "good" maternal body is emptied of sexuality and fixed to heterosexual desire. The task of the lesbian mother is, then, to "prove" that she is the "good enough mother" by playing down or denying her sexuality and, thus, demonstrating that she is worthy of gaining custody of her children. This is often fraught with difficulties and feminist investigations of custody cases in the 1970s are often highly critical of the judgements handed down to lesbian parents.[55]

As well as the justified concerns expressed about child custody cases, other key issues regarding lesbian mothering in the 1970s involve the examination of anxieties held by lesbians. Lesbian mothers express concerns about talking about their own lesbian identity with their children and how this might effect the children's psychosexual development.[56] The difficulties of lesbian parenting in a "heterosexist society" and the issue of feminist child raising are also explored.[57] Some feminists

---

[52] Ellen Lewin, *Lesbian Mothers, Accounts of Gender in American Culture*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993).

[53] For an overview of this literature see Victoria Clarke, 'Feminist perspectives on lesbian parenting: A review of the literature 1972-2002', *The Psychology of Women Section Review*, 7, 2, Autumn (2005): 11-23 and Victoria Clarke, 'From outsiders to motherhood to reinventing the family: Constructions of lesbian parenting in the psychological literature – 1886-2006', *Women's Studies International Forum,* 31, 2, March- April (2008): 118-128.

[54] Ruthann Robson, 'Mother: The Legal Domestication of Lesbian Existence', in *Mothers in Law: Feminist Theory and the Legal Regulation of Motherhood*, edited by Martha Albertson Fineman and Isabel Karpin (New York: Colmbia University Press, 1995).

[55] Clarke, 'Feminist perspectives of on lesbian parenting', pp. 12-13.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid, p. 13.

debate whether lesbian mothering is a radical act or a succumbing to dominant discourses of femininity.[58]

The major issues for lesbian mothers in the 1970s also feature in feminist investigations in the 1980s. These feminist examinations explore the relevant concerns in greater depth and broaden descriptions of lesbian mothering to include a diversity of maternal situations. This opening up of the category of lesbian parenting is achieved by investigations of class, race and the stories of mothers who are absent from the home.[59] Examining the experiences of lesbians who plan their family and the increasing number of those who co-parent also contributes to the broadening of notions of lesbian parenting. In addition to these issues discussions concerning lesbian mothering also centre on lesbian separatism and the parenting of male children.

According to academic Victoria Clarke lesbian feminist examinations of lesbian parenting in the 1980s focus on the politics of lesbian parenting.[60] In this divisive debate lesbian maternity is perceived in two ways. Some lesbian feminists view lesbian mothers as overturning conventional notions of both motherhood and the unsuitability of lesbians to become maternal bodies. Other lesbian feminists perceive the decision to mother as a "retrograde" reversal of a politically active lesbian identity to a mainstream one incarcerated in the patriarchal institution of motherhood. Clarke argues that this "radical/retrograde" discussion continues in the 1990s and 2000s due to the "lesbian baby boom" of the 1990s.[61] This marked increase in lesbians choosing to become mothers by means of co-parenting, adoption, fostering and access to reproductive technologies is also underwritten by considerable debate in various media.[62]

Since the 1990s, Clarke contends that the controversial "radical/retrograde" debate has become more prominent in academic research. Fields of inquiry in this topic area range from domestic arrangements in lesbian families and their division of labour to critiques of the definition of "mother" and "family" in lesbian-run households. Discussion also centres on the effects of maternity on lesbian identity – whether it

---

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid, p. 14.

[60] Ibid, p. 15.

[61] Ibid, pp. 16-17.

automatically assimilates lesbians into conventional motherhood or continues to distance lesbians from traditional maternity. Generally, the academic literature in this area argues for the potential of lesbian mothering and families to transgress conventional discourses of maternity and family and act as positive role models of "domestic equity" for heterosexual family structures.[63] Clarke concludes that "the dominant view is that lesbian families are reinventing the family, redefining family values, and transforming the meaning of parenting".[64]

In this discussion of lesbian mothers there are several echoes of earlier themes in this chapter. The need and the capacity to reinvent the family is one of the fundamental issues raised by feminists who critique conventional discourses of families and motherhood. Also, Firestone's notion of the potential liberatory power of technology surfaces in lesbians' use of reproductive technologies to enable them to become mothers. In these cases, however, reproductive technologies are used for a very different reason to that imagined by Firestone.

While the term "lesbian mother" engages with intersections of conventional narratives of sexuality and maternity many theorisations of mothering articulate class by challenging the view that middle-classness is the norm. The lack of feminist analyses of maternity that move beyond the treatment of dominant class concerns results partly from the inability of the predominantly white middle-class feminist movement to recognize its own immersion in middle-class privilege. British theorist Valerie Walkerdine argues: "All this has meant that the issues of subjectivity, how life was lived for those designated and regulated as Working Class, was never of any interest to ... feminism, and so there is little in terms of an oppositional discourse around these issues."[65] Feminist scholarship that does deal with narratives of class and maternity tends to either focus on working-class concerns and/or race issues. These texts are usually written by working-class women and/or women of colour.

---

[62] Clarke, 'From outsiders to motherhood to reinventing the family".

[63] Clarke, 'Feminist perspectives of on lesbian parenting' p. 19.

[64] Ibid, p. 19.

[65] Valerie Walkerdine, Helen Lucey, June Melody, "Class Attainment And Sexuality In Late Twentieth Century Britain", (Adelaide, SA: Proceedings of the Australian Women's Studies Association Seventh Conference, 16-18th April, 1998), p. 177.

One important text that examines working-class maternity is Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape For A Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* in which she writes about her own mother.[66] The text can be read alongside autobiographical books like writer Margaret Drabble's novel, *Jerusalem The Golden,* and the (semi-autobiographical) essays of academics Gerry Holloway and Val Walsh that tell of refusing what has conventionally been perceived as a female working-class fate of pregnancy and motherhood.[67] In Drabble's novel, published in 1967, working class culture is boring and repressive with a "commonsense" attitude to life. The mother is a cold and distant figure but later the reader learns that before she had children she was lively, intelligent, emotionally-present and wrote poetry. Working-class maternity is then shown to be a limiting structure that crushes the mother's hopes and potential.

Walsh and Holloway write in the 1990s of class and their own mothers. The authors credit their mothers with providing examples of women who refuse some of the limited scripts of working-class femininity.[68] Walsh's mother achieves this freedom by gaining an education through the means of a scholarship whereas Holloway's appraisal of her mother's rejection of conventional discourses of working-class maternity focuses on her economic and social independence. The lives of working-class women and children emerge from the texts of Steedman, Walsh and Holloway as fragments or shards of objects that are not familiar to mainstream middle-class narratives.

In her significant essay first published in 1994, 'Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing about Motherhood' Patricia Hill Collins critiques contemporary feminist engagements with motherhood as universalizations of an

---

[66] Carolyn Kay Steedman, *Landscape For A Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives*, (London: Virago, 1986).

[67] Margaret Drabble, *Jerusalem the Golden*, (New York: Morrow, 1967). Gerry Holloway, 'Finding a Voice: on Becoming a Working-Class Feminist Academic ' in *Class Matters: 'Working-Class' Women's Perspectives on Social Class* edited by Pat Mahony and Christine Zmroczek, (London, Bristol PA: Taylor and Francis, 1997), pp. 190-199. Val Walsh, 'Interpreting Class: Auto/Biographical Imaginations and Social Change' in *Class Matters: 'Working-Class' Women's Perspectives on Social Class* edited by Pat Mahony and Christine Zmroczek, (London, Bristol PA: Taylor and Francis, 1997), pp. 152-174, p. 158.

[68] Val Walsh, 'Interpreting Class: Auto/Biographical Imaginations and Social Change' in *Class Matters: 'Working-Class' Women's Perspectives on Social Class* edited by Pat Mahony and Christine Zmroczek, (London, Bristol PA: Taylor and Francis, 1997), pp. 152-174, p. 158.

idealized white western middle-class maternity.[69] According to Hill Collins white feminist maternal subjects are concerned with the following topics: isolation, sexuality, inter-familial relationships, depression, mothers as the bearers of gender oppression, and the possibility of mothers being liberated from male-dominated culture. Whilst Hill Collins states that these issues are important and require scholarly attention, she also posits that United States women of colour are chiefly concerned with other matters - physical survival, family labour patterns, fragmented families, race identity, as well as striving to achieve cultural and political empowerment. According to Hill Collins, feminist debate concerning mothering also decontextualizes and divides the maternal subject. The former process removes maternal bodies from specific historical and material locations, resources and constraints while the latter hardens and reinforces existing binaries of public/private, home/work, and individual/community. In summation of her argument, Hill Collins writes

> Feminist theories of motherhood are thus valid as partial perspectives, but cannot be seen as theories of motherhood generalizable to all women ...Varying placement in systems of privilege, whether race, class, sexuality, or age, generates divergent experiences with motherhood; therefore, examination of motherhood and mother-as-subject from multiple perspectives should uncover rich textures of difference.[70]

In these descriptions of raced maternity, conventional western conceptualizations of motherhood are shown to be fabrications which are historically, racially and economically specific.

Bonnie Thornton Dill posits that the exclusion of African-American, Latina, and Asian-American women from the dominant western notion of women's maternal domesticity separates their labour potential from their social value as mothers.[71] In Thornton Dill's analysis race intersects with class as she argues that the previously mentioned women of colour have historically been regarded as bodies for labouring work who toil rather than bodies of reproduction and transmission of their own cultural, social and familial knowledges.

---

[69] Patricia Hill Collins, 'Shifting the Center: race, class and feminist theorizing about motherhood', in *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency*, edited by Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Grace Chang, and Linda Rennie Forcey, (New York, London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 45-66.

[70] Hill Collins, 'Shifting the Center', p. 62.

[71] Bonnie Thornton Dill, "Our Mother's Grief: Racial Ethnic Women and the Maintenance of Families", *Journal of Family History* 13, (1988), pp. 415-431.

Evelyn Nakano Glenn's work on race and mothering supports Thornton Dill's argument.[72] Her interrogation of the labour histories of African-American, Mexican-American, and Japanese-American women in twentieth-century United States of America, demonstrates that the cultural and economic value ascribed to them privileges their potential to work as inexpensive labour above their worth as maternal bodies. Channelled into low paying domestic work, these women of colour were not permitted to indulge in the idealized white western fantasy of full-time motherhood with the home as a sheltered haven from the demands and stresses of the public sphere of paid work. As a result of this enforced servitude, Nakano argues mothers of colour were forced to continually commute between what are perceived as public and private types of labour - their paid work was seen to be a necessary condition of their personal mothering duties. According to Nakano the flow-on effects from this situation includes shared mothering with relatives or other community members, the notion that maternal work or caregiving is not exclusively a female responsibility and greater family assistance with domestic duties than the traditional model of the nuclear family offers.

Othermothers or shared mothering has its roots in America's era of slavery and remains a contemporary practice. The work of Patricia Hill Collins as well as Carol Stack and Linda Burton reveal that caring for African-American children in low-income households is characteristically shared among male and female family members of multi-generations or nearby neighbours (othermothers).[73] While Collins notes a decrease in this practice, she nevertheless observes the sharp contrast between the possibilities invoked in the inclusiveness of othermothering and the exclusiveness of the conventional nuclear family.

Representations of women of colour privileging the nurturance or "mothering" of a (usually) white employer's family above their own continue to circulate through contemporary western popular culture. Sau-ling C. Wong's study of images of "diverted mothering" and the figure of the caretaker of colour in films and fiction of

---

[72] Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Grace Chang and Linda Rennie Forcey, (eds), *Mothering: Ideology, Experience and Agency* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994).

[73] Carol B. Stack and Linda M. Burton, 'Kinscripts: Reflections on Family, Generation and Culture', in Evelyn Nakano Glenn *et al* (eds), *Mothering: Ideology, Experience and Agency* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 33-44.

the 1980s and 1990s explores this concept.[74] The caretaker is depicted as an asexual woman or man of colour who enacts conventional mothering duties usually in order to rescue his white employers who are placed in some type of dangerous situation. Representations of diverted mothering in films of the 1980s and 1990s recreate the traditional narrative of women of colour or their male equivalent, the caretaker, whose redirection of maternal energies serves their white charges rather than the people of their own race.[75] While the relationship of diverted mothering is conventionally depicted as positive and nurturing, contemporary critics Wong and Nakano Glenn demonstrate "the parasitic nature of the relationship".[76] Thus, as Nakano Glenn points out "The subtext of frustrated motherhood points to a larger dynamic in American society in which the vibrancy of the cultures of people of color is diverted and appropriated to shore up a dominant culture in decline".[77]

In Australia, similar narratives of displacement, normative constructions of motherhood and resistance to these dominant tropes inform Indigenous stories of maternity expressed in the life/auto/biographical writings of Indigenous women and also in *Bringing Them Home* – the report of the national inquiry into the removal of Indigenous children from their families.[78] In *Auntie Rita*, Indigenous historian, writer

---

[74] These texts typically depict a woman or man of colour who diverts her/his time and energy from his/her own family and maternal work in order to care for, and often rescue, the white employer.

[75] For examples of this "diverted mothering" see the following films: Clara's Heart. Director Robert Mulligan. With Whoopi Goldberg, Michael Ontkean, Kathleen Quinlan. MTM Enterprises, 1988; Driving Miss Daisy. Director Bruce Beresford. With Morgan Freeman and Jessica Tandy. Majestic Films International, 1989; Ghost. Director Jerry Zucker. With Patrick Swayze, Demi Moore, Whoopi Goldberg. Paramount Pictures, 1990; The Long Walk Home. Director Richard Pearce. With Sissy Spacek, Whoopi Goldberg. Dave Bell Associates, 1990; Grand Canyon. Director Lawrence Kasdan. With Danny Glover, Kevin Kline, Steve Martin, Mary McDonnell. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, 1991; The Hand That Rocks The Cradle. Director Curtis Hanson. With Annabella Sciorra, Rebecca de Mornay, Matt McCoy, Ernie Hudson. Hollywood Pictures, 1992; and Passion Fish. Director John Sayles. With Mary McDonnell, Alfre Woodard. Atchafalaya, 1992. See also Ann Petry's novel *The Street*, (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, [1946] 1998).

[76] Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *et al, Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency*, p. 9.

[77] Ibid.

[78] National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, Ronald Wilson (Commissioner), *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, (Sydney: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, April 1997). For a small sample of Indigenous women's life writings see Doris E. Kartinyeri, *Kick the Tin*, ((North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2000): Sally Morgan, *My Place*,

and activist Jackie Huggins gives an account of her mother's life in which she explores the difficult terrain of the translation of Indigenous accounts of life experiences from the medium of oral history to print.[79] Huggins' successful print retelling of her mother Rita's life mobilizes discourses of public/private, white/black, and official history/story. In contrast to contemporary white feminists' revolt against their own mothers, Huggins writes with great affection of her mother, crafting the text as a "gift" for "Auntie Rita".[80]

The intersection of notions of selfless giving to Indigenous communities, caring for children, and general nurturing under the umbrella of the term "mother" or the more colloquial, "mum" informs and fuels Huggins' *Auntie Rita.* These issues are also reflected in Mum Shirl's biography and the Web pages dedicated to remembering and recording her life as one of the most famous contemporary female Indigenous activists.[81] Both *Auntie Rita* and the book, *Mum Shirl* enact reclamations of mothering from the historically dominant discourse of white maternity. These texts tell of two women, both born in the 1920s, who survive multiple uprootings from their homes as well as continued attempts by white western culture to eradicate their Indigenous identity and culture. Through the stories told by these women – subjects, biographers, and authors – maternity is retold as Indigenous. Even though mothering in both accounts is figured as selfless nurturing, caring, and uncanny thrift, the stories still challenge the cosy domesticity and unacknowledged privilege of idealized white maternity.

As well as the acknowledgment of the racial, class and sexual identity specificities of the experience and institution of motherhood some feminists have argued for the development and discussion of explicit discourses of feminist mothering in order to

---

(Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1987); and, Margaret Tucker, *If Everyone Cared: Autobiography of Margaret Tucker*, (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1977).

79 Rita Huggins and Jackie Huggins, *Auntie Rita.* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1994).

80 Jackie Huggins, "Writing My Mother's Life" (Jackie Huggins on writing the biography of Rita Huggins), *Hecate*, vol 17, no. 1, May, 1991, pp. 88-95, p. 94.

81 MumShirl, *MumShirl: An Autobiography*, with the assistance of Bobbi Sykes. (Richmond, Vic: Heinemann Educational, 1981. See also 'Mum Shirl', Koori Freedom Fighters, *The Koori History Website*, available at http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/heroes5.html, date accessed 22/9/09. Pat Ormesher, ''Roberta Sykes Remembers MumShirl', *Redfern Oral History*, available at http://redfernoralhistory.org/OralHistory/RobertaSykesonMumShirl/tabid/145/Default.aspx , date accessed 22/9/09.

challenge the institution of motherhood. As previously mentioned, Andrea O'Reilly's writings draw attention to the lack of investigations of feminist mothering and offer thoughtful and practical insights into this area in her own texts.[82] O'Reilly's argument concerning feminist mothering centres on Adrienne Rich's identification of empowered mothering as the antidote to the oppressive institution of motherhood. According to Rich and O'Reilly "empowered mothering" occurs when mothers rely on their own experiences of maternity lived outside masculinist structures of motherhood. O'Reilly sums this up by stating "The goal then for feminist mothers was to move from motherhood to mothering or, more specifically, to mother against motherhood".[83] Although feminists have taken up the division of maternity into institution and experience O'Reilly contends that "the radical impetus and implications" of Rich's writings have not been fully explored.[84]

O'Reilly's work seeks to address the lack of investigations of feminist maternity and practices of empowered mothering. In her edited collection, *Feminist Mothering*, she brings together a diverse range of narratives that all challenge the institution of motherhood. Mindful of normative constructions of the Good Mother as white, middle-class, heterosexual, married, educated, and the primary carer of children, O'Reilly gathers examples of feminist mothering from a variety of contexts and perspectives. For instance, Kristin Esterberg's chapter examines the ways in which the figure of the lesbian mother is investigated in lesbian mother advice books.[85] Esterberg argues that lesbian mothers in these texts are seen to be partial challenges to conventional narratives of motherhood as they speak of a more egalitarian maternity yet discourses of race and class are not necessarily examined in these accounts. Shirley A. Hill's chapter explores African American examinations of mothering which investigate race and class as shaping factors of maternity.[86] *Feminist Mothering* also considers a maternal erotic, single mothers and maternalist activism as areas of inquiry

---

[82] Andrea O'Reilly, *Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering*, (Toronto: Women's Press, 2004). See also O'Reilly, *Feminist Mothering*, (New York: SUNY Press, 2008).

[83] O'Reilly, *Feminist Mothering*, p.192.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Kristin G. Esterberg, 'P;anned Parenthood: The Construction of Motherhood in Lesbian Mother Advice Books', in *Feminist Mothering* edited by O'Reilly, pp. 75-88.

[86] Shirley A. Hill, 'African American Mothers: Victimized, Vilified, and Valorized', Feminist Mothering edited by O'Reilly, pp. 107-121.

outside conventional discourses of motherhood that promote empowered practices of maternity.

In this section I have identified and traced key moments where a diversity of feminist theorists have challenged conventional tropes of motherhood. Despite these challenges to traditional notions of maternity, however, contemporary narratives of maternal bodies are still awash with images of the Good Mother clothed in the garments of the noughties SuperMum. I look for answers to these troubling issues in cyber(cultural)space. While there are numerous feminist investigations of maternity, there is very little material that examines feminist mothering or meetings of maternal bodies and the cyber-realm. To date feminist discussions tend to focus on intersections of maternity and technology in general and specifically reproductive technologies. Feminist examinations of reproductive technologies have been the focus of a great deal of activist work – the cornerstone of many feminisms. This partly accounts for the concentration of feminist scholarship in this area. In order to further my project of exploring representations of maternity in cyber(cultural)space I first turn to feminist discussions of reproductive technologies.

Maternity and Technology – Cyborgean Maternal Bodies and Earth Mother Birthing.

My final focus in this overview of feminist literature about motherhood returns to the intersection between motherhood and technology first explored by Shulamith Firestone in the 1970s. She is one of the first feminist theorists to write of the liberatory potential of technology for women. In the late twentieth-century/end of the first decade of the 2000s, feminist explorations of this field of inquiry examine the ways in which the use of reproductive and other new technologies assist in the construction of maternal and fetal identities. This area of investigation provides fruitful grounds for examining conventional depictions of maternal bodies which rest upon narratives of the natural constructed in opposition to technology. In order to navigate a path through the terrain of pro- and anti-technology feminist thought I use the theoretical framework of Carol Stabile.[87] Just as cyber(cultural)space has been described through dystopian, utopian and middle ground accounts, Stabile describes

---

[87] Carol A. Stabile, *Feminism and the Technological Fix* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994).

three positions she calls technomania (technophilia), technophobia and technopragmatism. Her identification of these positions is useful to my project as it enables me to situate and interrogate pro- and anti-technology viewpoints in both broad theoretical writings and specifically, feminist examinations of biomedical innovations.

Feminist academic Renate Klein, who tends towards the technophobic camp in this debate, identifies reproductive technology as the entire spectrum of biomedical and technological interventions possible during the processes of reproduction and childbirth. These "interferences" include technology aimed at testing for fetal abnormalities, the termination of pregnancy, the production of a live fetus, often promising superior childbirth or a "perfect" child. [88] The crux of the ongoing debate within contemporary feminism concerning reproductive technologies revolves around the contexts and manner in which these forces are employed and the political and social effects of the interventions.

In the twenty-first century, the relationship between the maternal body and the fetus is undoubtedly altered from the woman-centred experiences of the pre-industrial and pre-medicalized world. Experiences of maternity continue to be moulded by the changing deployments of reproductive technologies, especially prenatal medicine, as well as the growing area of knowledge concerning fetal development. Continual innovations in the areas of prenatal screening, collaborative conception, fetal surgery, and genetics encourage concern for fetal well-being. As a result of the medical, legal, social and political discourses surrounding technological advances in this area, the concept of maternal duty of care for the fetus that is carried to full term is undergoing an enormous redefinition. The implementation of these innovations carries with it the potential for the increasing medicalized surveillance of pregnant women and the commodifcation of reproductive processes.

Technomanic argument concerning contemporary technologies of reproduction flows from two main sources. According to Stabile the first technomanic viewpoint looks to an embracing of biomedical innovation. Vigorous debate in a number of print and online media has been generated by the first thread of technomania. This position

---

[88] Renate Klein, 'What's New About the New Technologies?' in Gena Corea, Jalna Hanmer, and Renate Klein, *Man-Made Women*, (London: Hutchinson, 1985).

is not only a feminist standpoint it is also a mainstream norm. Technomanic rhetoric proclaims that biomedical innovations permit the elements of choice and flexibility to be included in the processes of human reproduction. According to this logic, women are no longer confined by their reproductive capacities. The integration of reproduction into career, lifestyle and health considerations as well as the potential to choose the father and genetically screen the fetus could be read as liberatory discourses by feminists. As Shulamith Firestone proclaims "The first demand for any alternative system must be ... The freeing of women from the tyranny of their reproductive biology by every means available".[89]

The second strand of technomania is driven by postmodern thought which "ceases to look back".[90] While Stabile does not dismiss all postmodern thought in what she identifies as the second thread of technomania, she offers a strong critique of these theories and the ways in which they are used. Stabile argues that postmodern thinking has assisted in the development of a feminist technomania in which utopian narratives of the future take precedence over stories of the past and/or present. She states that postmodern thought blurs boundaries and merges identities as it offers "an ideology based on endless and multiple play of difference."[91] Stabile contends that feminist postmodern technomania challenges the entrenched and restrictive binary of woman/nature.[92] Yet, the same aspects of this form of technomania prevent a sustained analysis of class which, according to Stabile, leads to "a deepening sense of social and political apathy."[93] Stabile also criticizes feminist postmodern technomania for a general failure to understand that technologies operate on and with marked and embodied subjects in RL. To go beyond what she perceives as theorisations dislocated from a true situatedness Stabile calls for feminist activism based in theory that investigates the possibilities and problems posed by technologies that work for and with marked and specifically located human bodies.

Just as the position of technomania is a complete embracing of technology the technophobic standpoint is an uncritical rejection of technologies. Feminist

---

[89] Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution,* (London: Women's Press, 1979), p. 270.

[90] Stabile, *Technological Fix*, p. 45.

[91] Stabile, p. 44.

[92] Ibid, p. 135.

technophobic argument concerning contemporary technologies of reproduction follows two main lines of thought. The first line of argument posits that reproductive technologies are the particularly repugnant product of a masculinist science that constantly strives to perfect the domination of a nature which is inevitably linked to the feminine.[94] This argument is part of a larger debate concerning the merits of western science that is positioned as objective, patriarchal and positivist as opposed to feminist thought and methodology that is grounded in the lived experience of the female subject. Therefore, the technophobic argument continues, these treatments that ostensibly liberate women from the oppressive burden of reproduction actually reinforce the already strongly felt grip of a medical model that seeks to reduce women to breeders. For example, academic Janice Raymond dismisses biomedical innovations as "spermocracy"; "reproductive abuse" and "medicalized pornography".[95] This technophobic line of thought perceives these technologies as evidence of the inevitable patriarchal manipulation and control that is deeply embedded in all of the structures of contemporary western society.

As well as technophobic feminist investigations of reproductive technologies, narratives of technophobic thought are also discernible in, for example, Caroline Merchant's eco-feminist text *Death of Nature* and in many texts of the natural childbirth movement.[96] Amongst these writers, the foregrounding of an essentialist philosophy posits that some psychological characteristics and desires are proper to the sphere of femininity whereas pleasures and traits that fall outside these boundaries are definitively patriarchal. Therefore, expressions of a nurturing and maternally oriented personality are perceived as particularly female/womanly while deviations from the "norm", such as an orientation towards technology, form evidence that the subject has been seduced by duplicitous patriarchal discourses. These notions of rigidly defined

---

93 Ibid, p. 154.

94 Ibid.

95 Wendy McElroy, 'Breeder Reactionaries: The "feminist" war on reproductive technologies', *Reason Online*, December 1994, available at http://www.reason.com/news/show/29569.html, date accessed 26/9/00.

96 Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980). For a small selection of the many natural childbirth texts see Janet Balaskas, *Active Birth: A Concise Guide to Natural Childbirth*, (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1989); Sheila Kitzinger, *Ourselves as Mothers: the Universal Experience of Motherhood*, (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1995); and, Ina May Gaskin, *Spiritual Midwifery*, (Summertown: Book Publishing Company, 3rd Edition, 1990).

gender traits and behaviours merely reinscribe the conventional desire to define maternal bodies in terms of the organic, natural feminine.

The second strand of technophobic argument revolves around the essentially capitalist nature of western economic and legal systems.[97] These technophobes argue that the implementation of new reproductive technologies will be defined in accordance with concepts of contract law, individual rights, and self-interest. This line of technophobic thought considers that these elements form part of the legal framework of a discriminatory and exploitative capitalistic system.

The logic of technophobic feminism in whatever avenue it finds expression perceives that all reproductive technologies within the inescapable confines of patriarchy are always already oppressive. In addition, technophobic feminists evacuate notions of women's choice and agency in dealing with biomedical narratives of reproduction. If women choose to make use of contemporary reproductive technologies they are automatically labelled by the technophobes as dupes of the patriarchy. As feminist author Janice Raymond argues:

> Feminists must go beyond choice and consent as a standard for women's freedom. Before consent, there must be a self-determination so that consent does not simply amount to acquiescing to the available options. Therefore, the terms of debate within feminist thinking has shifted from choice to self-determination. I assume that this ideological movement must be an uncomfortable/difficult one for the radical feminists whose basic tennet within feminism has centred around political struggles to ensure the availability of choice to all women.[98]

Technophobic feminist arguments that focus on the medicalization of reproductive processes, however, do not take into account the benefits of biomedical innovations of lowered infant and maternal mortality rates, increased health and less postpartum complications (admittedly most particularly for white middle class women). Indeed, this dismissal of the variety of women's needs, preferences and desires regarding antenatal care performs the same service as the medical model that technophobes argue against - it strips women of their flesh, blood, skin and denies them agency and self-determination.

---

[97] For discussion concerning the technophobe position see Stabile, *Feminism and the Technological Fix*, p. 1, p. 9, pp. 50-58.

[98] Janice Raymond, *Women as Wombs: Reproductive technologies and the battle over women's freedom* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993), p. 103.

Stabile's examination of technophobia, especially eco-feminist theory, reveals a nostalgic yearning for a social order based on matriarchal principles. According to Stabile, eco-feminist thinking is dependent upon and delimited by the linking of women with nature which promotes projects based on recuperation and essentialism. In the same way that conventional narratives of the woman/nature binary evacuate the terms of historical and material contexts, Stabile argues that ecofeminism also describes a depoliticized environment emptied of the specificities of race and class.

As Stabile considers both technomania and technophobia to be inadequate responses to issues raised by intersections of maternity and reproductive technologies she proposes a viewpoint she calls technopragmatism that offers a way of critically evaluating the problems of and opportunities offered by technologies of reproduction. A number of feminist theorists examine reproductive technologies through a technopragmatic lens. For instance, in her nuanced accounts of ultrasound technology, Rosalind Petchesky offers a technopragmatic viewpoint. For Petchesky technology does not possess an intrinsic meaning. In the case of ultrasound developments various contexts produce different meanings. For instance, Petchesky writes of the positive outcomes that may be derived from the use of ultrasounds in supported and wanted pregnancies.[99] Petchesky, however, also criticizes the use of ultrasound as an ideological weapon to construct the fetus as a "person" in order to deter pregnant women who are seeking abortions.[100]

Alongside Petchesky, Stabile offers technopragmatic viewpoints while critiquing technomanic arguments. Stabile's criticisms of what she terms technomania centres around her Marxist feminist examination of representations of the positions of mother and fetus. She argues that the movements in materiality between humans and machines, as expressed in Haraway's cyborgean politics, are phenomena that have cultural and social causes as opposed to effects. Stabile outlines how the use of visually based reproductive technologies like ultrasound technology has erupted in a material shift in which the maternal body is rendered invisible and formalised into the position of Mother while the fetus becomes the fetal icon. Stabile argues that reproductive technologies have been used to erase the pregnant woman's body and led to a "disarticulation" of the female. Nevertheless, Stabile also notes that this shift in

---

[99] Petchesky, 'Foetal Images', p. 71.

materiality is too complex to be completely explained away by the blaming of fetal visualization and technology for this situation.

In a similar vein to Stabile, Barbara Duden's focus on the social history of the body and European medicine traces trajectories of increasing medicalizaiton of reproductive processes. It is her concentration on representations of the pregnant body and the fetus in historical and social contexts that unveils the constructedness of contemporary western narratives of reproductive technologies as necessary and inevitable. Furthermore, Duden posits that the ways in which reproductive technologies are currently deployed within webs of medical practice and policy has transformed pregnancy from women's private and sensual experience to public surveillance and scrutiny. Drawing chiefly on examples from Germany and the United States of America, Duden outlines the increasingly scientifically-based medical narratives that have and are still in the process of erasing and re-constructing maternal bodies. In conjunction with this erasure, the fetus is constructed as "a life" rather than the *potential* for independent life. That is, Duden remarks upon the double movement of rendering maternal bodies invisible while the fetus is increasingly represented as separate and autonomous from the female body that sustains the embryonic life. Thus, Duden argues that concerns regarding the "aliveness" or well-being of the pregnant woman have been superseded by discourses of fetal personhood or the "life" of the fetus.

While Duden is just as vehement as the radical feminist technophobes about the role of legal and medical discourses in the rendering invisible of the pregnant woman's body and the privileging of fetal personhood, her engagement with these issues does not spring from an essentialist viewpoint. Her experiential account of these concerns comes from the point of view of a lost subjectivity. Duden writes of what women have lost - agency, physicality, and the right to their own experiences and interpretations of reproductive processes. The costliness to women of medico-legal discourses that privilege fetal "life" over and above the pregnant woman's "aliveness'

---

[100] Ibid.

is summed up in the translation of the original text's German title, which can be roughly translated into English as *The Woman's Body as a Public Place.*[101]

Academic Judy Wajcman also treads a technopragmatic path through feminist debates about reproductive technologies. She attempts to separate technology from science arguing that the former is not only a knowledge but it also involves "practices and institutions" as "technology is primarily about the creation of artefacts".[102] Although Wajcman argues that technology itself can be regarded as a masculine construct, she tempers her conclusion with the argument that the roping of masculinity to technologies "is neither essential nor immutable, and therefore the potential exists for its transformation".[103] While Wajcman is, like the majority of feminists since Shulamith Firestone, deeply critical of the increasingly medicalized and steadfastly masculinized reproductive technologies, she is equally opposed to the technophobic tendency within feminism to refuse acknowledgment of the capabilities of technology to improve the quality of women's lives. Wajcman contends that this acceptance of the positive uses of technology would be the inevitable result of "the realization that technology itself is a social construct".[104]

All of the texts in which I have identified technophobic threads fail to adequately engage with the crucial question: Why do so many women choose to use contemporary reproductive technologies? Are all of these women merely weak vessels that have been coerced and manipulated into medically managed pregnancies and births? This is obviously a far too simplistic analysis of an extremely complex situation. While femininity is often defined in terms of maternity - itself a highly charged term in contemporary western culture - the reasons that women desire to become mothers are complex, personal, culturally constructed but varied and often contradictory. The various processes involved in human reproduction are also complicated so that technophobic analyses of these states are too lacking in critical engagement in the topic to be useful in this debate. Similarly, technomanic arguments lack the critical insight into the social, political and cultural repercussions that may

---

[101] Ann Waltner, 'Review', *Disembodying Women: Perspectives on Pregnancy and the Unborn,* by Barbara Duden, *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Spring 1996, pp. 759-762, pp. 760-61.

[102] Judy Wajcman, *Feminism Confronts Technology* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), p. 13.

[103] Wajcman, *Feminism Confronts Technology,* p. 159.

[104] Wajcman, *Feminism Confronts Technology,* Preface x.

ensue from uncritical useage of technology generally and reproductive technologies specifically. The technopragmatic position, however, offers both strong critiques of the ways in which reproductive technology is employed as well as an acknowledgement of the positive outcomes that may result from their use. Technopragmatic arguments suggest that if a mother-centred rather than techno-medical focused approach to the use of reproductive technologies were to occur maternal bodies would not be rendered invisible while the fetus is personalized and privileged. Instead, maternal bodies would find agency and new subjectivities of maternity would be created.

Like the realm of reproductive technologies, the technologically-charged domain of cyber(cultural)space, often constructed in opposition to women and femininity and so to maternity, is another space and area of scholarly contention in which there is the potential to question conventional narratives of mothering. Similarly cyberfeminist investigations of cyber(cultural)space contend that it is a realm of possibility in which dominant discourses of gender, race, class, sexuality and maternity may be challenged. In order to investigate this topic further I now turn to an examination of cybermaternity in the Web pages of the Internet. In the next chapter, Brrreeeders in CyberSpace, I consider the following questions. In the hyper-commercial domain of cyber(cultural)space is it possible to find depictions of mothering that shift away from the commodity-driven maternity that saturates the Net? How are maternal bodies constructed in the free-flowing data streams of cyber(cultural)space? What sort of communities do they form? Is cyber(cultural)space the realm of infinite possibilities in which maternal bodies will be enabled to float free of the constraints of traditional tropes of motherhood?

Let's get wired.

Chapter 3
CyberMamas – Brrreeders in CyberSpace

After outlining some important feminist investigations of maternity I now turn to my own examinations of representations of mothering in cyber(cultural)space. In this chapter of the thesis I focus on electronic maternity texts.

Into the Websites

With the exceptions of periods of approximately four months each in the years 2001, 2004 and 2006, I have regularly examined the maternity e-texts I focus upon in this thesis from August 1999 to the present moment. During these periods I logged on to the maternity websites under consideration here at least once a day and sometimes at night during breastfeeding sessions. The biological workings of maternity were very much with me as I examined the sites in an academic sense and also in personal quests for information. Even though I regularly recorded information or quotes from participants' postings as part of my academic research, my personal involvement with the three websites varied. I turned to the commercial sites chiefly for information about health and child rearing. These sites proved to be useful, especially in the early days of new motherhood when I anxiously sought assistance with settling the baby, teething remedies and ideas about introducing solid food to the infant's diet. I did not post messages on these sites and did not become a part of their communities, grounded in the mainstream culture of the United States, as the generally conservative tone of the highly commercialized forums is so different from my own cultural and political standpoint.

Bad Mothers Club (BMC), however, has always been to me a great source of humour and fun that tends to alleviate the constrictive weight of worry that I sometimes feel about maternity and child raising. I often laugh out loud at the extremely funny and insightful material on the *BMC* site which has raised comments from other students in the office space I once shared concerning the nature and seriousness of my academic research considering it is so obviously enjoyable. Apart from the previously detailed interruptions to my academic work I sporadically – every few days or sometimes once a week - posted messages on the *BMC* forums from 1999

to 2004. I always enjoyed my interactions with the Bad Mothers as their humour was a refreshing change from the earnest restrictions of other online maternity communities. At times, though, I felt somewhat outside their general social circle as the community is steeped in social, cultural and political discourses of middle-class Britain. After I had my third child in 2004, I found it difficult to find the time to continue to post messages in order to maintain online relationships I had established with the Bad Mothers.

Just as I was unable to maintain my level of involvement with *BMC* from 2004 onwards my postings on the third website under examination, *Hip Mama* decreased from daily messages to contact once a month or every few months. Personally I felt, and still feel, "at home" in the world of *Hip Mama* as I could rapidly engage with the political orientation of the site, its deeply ingrained irreverence for convention and the feisty online personalities of the participants. My reduced personal involvement with *BMC* and *Hip Mama* from 2004 onwards is, ironically, due to having less time available in general after having a baby who has grown into an extremely active child who prefers not to sleep. My semi-withdrawal from the two online maternity communities also became necessary so that I could critically engage with the texts. I found that as a result of my personal involvement in the websites I was concentrating on the aspects I found pleasurable to the exclusion of critical observations of these texts and I began to write as a fan about the sites. While I want to clearly state my personal investment in the websites, I also aim to critically investigate them. Interminglings of the personal and the academic is inevitable and enjoyable in my research work for this thesis but if the focus falls solely on the pleasure of the former the important threads of critique remain unexamined and thus, a partial account is rendered of the cyber-sites.

The strong intertwinings between my academic work and my family life demonstrate the constructedness of public/private and work/family binaries. This rupturing of binarized divisions is echoed in the domain of maternal online communities where personal issues are discussed in domains that are often open, freely accessed and public. As feminist ethnographer Radhika Gajjala writes "Internet exchanges are very often assumed to be like telephone exchanges or personal

(hardcopy) letters."[1] E-sites, however, usually do not facilitate closed and intimate exchanges between participants. Website forums, blogs and bulletin boards often attract a large geographically dispersed membership and communication between contributors is able to be viewed – in some cases by the general public - and commented upon by all of the members at any time. A Bulletin Board is an electronic version of noticeboards found in shops and other public places on which people can leave messages and feedback for others. In the twenty-first century the term Bulletin Board is often used to refer to any online forum. Internet forums are online discussion sites on which users post messages or respond to other posts. Forums are driven by user-generated content which forms threads under topic headings. They are generally social sites that encourage open discussion. While blogs are sometimes personal expressions like an online diary, the way in which websites like *Hip Mama* use this form of communication is more like a virtual forum in which user/interactors post news and commentary on topics to which other users respond. Online responses to Bulletin Boards, forums and personal blogs are usually archived in print form and able to be accessed at any time by anyone – except in the case of closed communities. Generally these messages or posts are more like electronic versions of letters to the editors than private letters or conversations.

Investigations of website forums where people discuss personal concerns raise issues of copyright and ethics. When I first embarked on Internet research I was advised by the copyright officer at the University of Tasmania that the forums I was examining were in the public domain and freely accessed so that anyone could quote moderate amounts from these texts in a not-for-profit context.

In addition to copyright issues there are also ethical considerations when conducting any kind of Internet research. Participants in online forums can make personal disclosures or raise controversial issues that could render him/her vulnerable. I am aware that it is vitally important that forum participants' privacy and trust are not violated. The maternal website forums and blogs I research and interact with are not comprised of obviously vulnerable populations as might be, for example, an online support group for survivors of child sexual abuse. And so the website forums I research in this thesis are– with two exceptions – open, free and public. From January

---

[1] Radhika Gajjala, *Cyber Selves: Feminist Ethnographies of South Asian Women*, (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2004), p. 38.

31st 2008 *BMC* charges a subscription fee to post messages but the general public are still able to access and read all the threads in the forum. I have not quoted examples from the *BMC* after the date it converted to paid subscription-only forum contributions. Reader/interactors must register to post to the BR Mums bulletin boards and forums and the *Hip Mama* blogs but this registration is free and anyone can join. The general public can also access and read all available discussion threads on the BR Mums and *Hip Mama* websites.

Throughout this chapter I draw on general information from the Buy-Right Mum, *BMC* and *Hip Mama* websites. I also quote from actual posts written by these cyber-maternal bodies. When quoting or referring to the various cyber-mothers I use the (usually fictional) names they attach to their posts and italicize these names.

In the rest of the introduction to this chapter I briefly interrogate women's interactions with print magazines. Then I investigate the concept of remediation, as coind by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, as a way of thinking about the move from print to online maternity magazines. Next, I consider one of the major underlying threads common to both mainstream and alternative online maternity publications – the lure of community. My investigation then follows the popular movement from RL (print publications) to cyber(cultural)space (e-texts).

In the second section of this chapter concerning websites I focus on an investigation of three commercial texts, *BabyCenter*, *Maternitymall* and *Americanbaby*. In the next two sections, I interrogate the humorous e-magazine the *Bad Mothers Club* and the alternative e-zine *Hip Mama*. I examine the ways in which these sites construct maternity. Maternal bodies are constructed by the commodity-drenched sites, I argue, in terms of consumption, popularized desire to attain technological and medical knowledge, voyeurism and anxiety. The *Bad Mothers Club* is a witty take on maternity that holds notions of conventional motherhood up to ridicule. *Hip Mama* writes an alternative maternity that is inclusive of that which traditional notions of motherhood seek to evacuate from maternal bodies. Yet both *BMC* and *Hip Mama*, in their own ways, reinstate conventional notions of motherhood. I chose the three commercial sites as they rank highly in the results of Web searches and, therefore, are some of the most accessible texts available to those

seeking maternity e-texts.[2] According to online research, the commercial Web pages also enjoy high levels of customer loyalty which suggests the effective utilization of content, medium and marketing in order to attract and maintain a strong client base.[3] Although *BMC* and *Hip Mama* do not rate as highly as the commercial sites in terms of Web search rankings or regular hits, they are still popular online texts that receive acclaim for their identifications of maternities outside the conventional.[4]

Print Magazines

Mainstream women's magazines (and their sub-set of maternity publications) are sources of pleasure and agency as well as standard-bearers of traditional femininity and maternal bodies. These publications are enmeshed in intertwinings of commercialism, female pleasure, information-gain and appeals to community. I argue that the paradoxical texts support different, and somewhat contradictory, interpretations and thinking about women's popular culture. On the one hand, women's and maternity magazines in the early twenty-first century still rely upon the traditional representations of femininity identified by early feminist examinations of mainstream women's magazines.[5] While mainstream women's and maternity

---

2 My most recent search (29/2/08) involved three of the largest and best known search engines, Google, Yahoo, and Altavista. Using the search terms "baby", "maternity", and "maternity shopping" on all three engines *BabyCenter* rated in the first page of results from Yahoo, Google and Altavista. *Maternitymall* appeared in the fifth page of results in Google and the first page of results in Yahoo and Altavista. *Americanbaby* appeared in the fifth page of results in Yahoo and Google but it also made the first page of Altavista results.

3 Quantcast, *maternitymall.com*, July 2007, available at http://www.quantcast.com/maternitymall.com, date accessed 04/09/07.

4 Please see following websites: Quantcast, *Hip Mama* available at http://www.quantcast.com/hipmama.com, date accessed 5/4/08. Rosie Millard, 'Thanks, Britney, from all bad mothers" *Times Online*, 20th January, 2008, available at http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/women/families/article3215277.ece, date accessed 21 January, 2008; 'Join the Bad Mothers Club' *Families SouthEast*, available at http://www.familiesonline.co.uk/article/articleview/443/1/45, date accessed 4/4/08; and 'Bad Mothers Club', *StumbleUpon, discover new Web sites*, date accessed 4/4/08.

5 Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc, [1963], 2001); Janice Winship. *Inside Women's Magazines*, (London: Pandora,1987), p. xiii; Joke Hermes, *Reading Women's Magazines: An Analysis of Everyday Media Use*, (Oxford: Polity Press, 1999); and, David Gauntlett, *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction*, London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 184.

Angela McRobbie. *Feminism and Youth Culture: From Jackie to Just Seventeen*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991); Stevi Jackson 'Ignorance is bliss: when you are Just Seventeen', *Trouble and Strife*, No. 33, 1996, pp. 50-60 cited in "*More*! New Sexualities in Girls' and Women's Magazines." in *Back to Reality? Social Experience and cultural studies* edited by Angela McRobbie.(Manchester and New York: Manchester University

publications generally focus on traditional notions of maternal bodies, these texts also, in some ways, encourage a feminist stance concerning agency and informed choice-making regarding issues pertaining to motherhood.

Feminist theorists Lorna Stevens and Pauline Maclaran argue that women's magazines in general, operate as "dreamworlds" – places of imaginative play to which readers "retreat".[6] Stevens and Maclaran posit that the conflation of femininity, shopping and consumption encouraged by women's magazines and department stores facilitates the creation of a "shopping imaginary" in which readers consume in a multitude of ways that rely upon imagination, aspiration and fantasy.[7] According to the authors, the harnessing of consumer desire by the production of a variety of goods, services and information enables the reader to play with meanings and identities. Thus, consumption operates on two levels within women's print and online magazines – the literal consuming of the text and the goods and services promoted in it as well as the anticipation and promotion of desire.[8]

Feminist theorist Celia Lury also argues for magazines as a site of potential agency and control. She claims that for a woman the act of looking at a magazine encourages a move in this direction.[9] According to Lury, this look is a particularly empowered feminine gaze as opposed to a masculine and objectifying gaze. Feminist cultural theorist Tania Modleski, however, claims that the pleasures that a mainstream text offers the reader are only temporarily successful as they are an "ultimate failure".[10] Modleski acknowledges the pleasures to be gained from reading these popular texts. Nevertheless, she argues that these texts ultimately enact reconciliations between

---

Press), 1997, 190-209; Andrea Stuart, "Feminism: Dead or Alive?" in *Identity: Community, Culture, and Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 28-42; and, Charlotte Brunsdon, *Screen Tastes: Soap Opera to Satellite Dishes*, (London: Routledge, [1991] 1997).

6 Lorna Stevens, Pauline Maclaran, 'Exploring the "Shopping Imaginary": The Dreamworld of Women's Magazines', *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 4, 4 June (2005), 282-292. See also Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, reprint, 1991).

7 Stevens and Maclaran, 'Exploring the "Shopping Imaginary", pp. 283-284.

8 Ibid., pp 282-284.

9 Celia Lury, *Consumer Culture*,. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1966), p. 148.

10 Tania Modleski, *Loving With A Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women*, (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 68.

women and masculinist narratives which prevent both text and subject from fully using feminist strategies to move beyond dominant discourses.

While both Lury and Modelski comment on women's reading practices of mainstream texts from a feminist standpoint, David Gauntlett discusses the mechanics of reading mainstream magazines. Gauntlett suggests that consumers of women's magazines do not read in a linear fashion from the beginning to the end of the text.[11] Instead, Gauntlett states that readers tend to "flip through" the texts reading an article here and ignoring other sections - engaging strongly with certain parts of the text while skim reading others. He argues that this reading style produces a "pick and mix" reader who charts her own way through the text.

Maternity Magazines

The print texts that I refer to as maternity magazines are a range of publications that focus on pregnancy, conception, labour, birth and a range of child rearing or parenting issues. Some of these magazines use the term "parents" in their title. Usually the texts are a mix of chatty stories about birth or issues involving a range of parenting/mothering and childrearing concerns as well as information about pregnancy, labour and birth peppered with medical jargon. Maternity magazines rework the layout, tone and style of general women's publications. These maternity publications use a tone of intimacy similar to that employed by mainstream magazines. Maternity magazines also foreground messages from an editor who welcomes the reader as well as demonstrating her authority to speak for the magazine's readership. Other features maternity magazines use include letters to the editor, readers' stories and photos, articles on birth or a range of delivery and/or child rearing issues, advertisements, as well as recommendations about children's clothes, books, DVDs, films, and equipment like high chairs, cots, change tables, toiletries, and car seats. Products advertised for mothers revolve around fashion, beauty and labour-saving devices. All of the narratives in maternity magazines – even the readers' stories – appear to be edited so that they fit the glossy and generally up-beat style of the mainstream publication. The proliferation of maternity magazine titles and increasing circulation rates in the last ten years suggest a continually growing niche market for these texts.

Like mainstream women's publications, contemporary maternity magazines promote a discourse of maternity that is at times feminist. They provide space for women to write about their real life experiences of pregnancy, childbirth and other issues regarding child raising. This works as an antidote to the absence of women's voices in debates about reproductive health and pregnancy.[12] The focus on everyday women's experiences and stories also permits women to be the authors rather than the subjects of narratives about maternal bodies.[13] While these aspects of maternity magazines undoubtedly display a feminist sensibility, I argue that maternity magazines are caught up in the same difficulties that theorist Ros Ballaster identifies with regard to generalist women's magazines. That is, maternity magazines, like mainstream magazines, are feminist in that they are vehicles of pleasure and useful information for women while also constructing and broadcasting conventional discourses of race, class and sex.[14]

Increasingly these maternity magazines are moving beyond the print sphere into the domain of cyber(cultural)space. Most print maternity publications currently have some form of online counterpart. Before I turn to an examination of some of these cyber-maternity magazines I turn to a brief discussion of Jay David Bolter and Richard Gruisin's notion of remediation in order to examine the ways in which aspects of print texts are imported into the cyber domain.

Remediation

Cybertheorists Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin challenge modernist narratives that privilege the new by stating that digital technologies - virtual reality, computer graphics and the World Wide Web – are not innovations that "improve" upon or

---

[11] Gauntlett, *Media, Gender and Identity:* pp. 196-198.

[12] For discussions concerning the lack of women's voices in narratives of reproduction see Tess Cosslett, *Women Writing Childbirth: Modern Discourses of Motherhood,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994); Carol Stabile, *Feminism and The Technological Fix,* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1994); and, Helen Marshall, "Our Bodies, Ourselves: Why We Should Add Old Fashioned Empirical Phenomenology to the New Theories of the Body." in *Feminist Theory and the Body* edited by Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 64-76.

[13] Cosslett (*Women Writing Childbirth*) argues that women's experience of pregnancy, labour and birth are usually written by others rather than the mother authoring the story herself.

[14] Ros Ballaster, *Women's Worlds: Ideology, Femininity and the Woman's Magazines,* (Hampshire: MacMillan Education, 1991), p. 2.

advance former technology. Instead, they argue that new technologies, rework, compete with and incorporate aspects of (older) print and analogue media. Bolter and Grusin describe this reworking or refashioning of "prior media forms" as *remediation*.[15]

According to Bolter and Gruisin, the process of remediation stems from dynamic interactions and tensions between two primary forces that drive and sustain the process: immediacy and hypermediacy.[16] Immediacy is the erasure of the gap between the object in question and its representation so that the representation is believed to be the object itself.[17] The process of immediacy harnesses popular contemporary desire for transparency.[18] An example of this desire for transparency is found in "race car" computer games that position the viewer "behind" the wheel of a racing car. In this instance, immediacy functions to melt away the visibility of the borders of the computer game, placing the viewer/user in the middle of the invisibly mediated experience.

Bolter and Grusin posit that the other element vital to remediation – hypermediacy – draws on user "hyper" awareness of the medium, itself.[19] Hypermediacy utilizes subjects' desire for immediacy and transparency rendering a hyper-awareness of the act of seeing or gazing.[20] The most well-known example of hypermediacy remains The World Wide Web. Navigation through the Web occurs when viewer/interactors click on word or image links and fresh images or text appear either directly erasing the previous symbols or in a new window laid over the previous one or in an overlapping tiled effect. Viewer/interactors are constantly clicking on links, using an array of menus, and scrolling through images and text in order to access new information. All of this continual activity inevitably leads to the user/interactor's hyper-awareness of the Web as media.

---

[15] Jay David Bolter and Richard Gruisin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, (London, England, Cambridge, Massachussetts: MIT Press, 2000), p. 273.

[16] Ibid, p. 5.

[17] Ibid, pp. 21-24 and 30.

[18] Ibid, p. 5.

[19] Ibid, pp. 31-34.

[20] Ibid., pp. 6-11

The authors contend that hypermediacy and immediacy both express from their opposing poles, desire for the "real".[21] This is not in any sense a searching for an objective and fundamental plane of existence. Instead, the "real" with regard to digital remediation is defined in terms of user experience. The ways in which immediacy, hypermediacy and interactivity intertwine in Web pages illustrates this point. The Web is obviously hypermediated in the participant's constant use of interfaces and the almost overwhelming amount of data available. This medium is also a domain of immediacy given its almost constant availability and its ability to access and refashion other media. User interactivity, however, intersects with hypermediacy and immediacy to intensify viewer/users' involvement and emotional responses. Unlike media such as film and television where the final product is chiefly created for the consumer, viewer/users of Web pages construct their own cyber-narratives and experiences. S/he is able to rapidly access a plethora of sites (immediacy) but needs to constantly interact with interfaces, links and other features of Web pages (hypermediacy). Bolter and Grusin argue that this continual return to the hypermediated features of the site works to strengthen rather than decrease participants' feelings of immediacy, transparency and engagement with the real. The authors claim that the desire for immediacy and transparency is re-channeled into close participant involvement with the cyber-texts. In this argument, the viewer/user's active engagement with the content and processes of the site(s) drives him/her into and beyond the hypermediated interface to "real" and immediate experience generating emotional responses.

The processes of remediation translate one narrative into a variety of forms within circuits of material and economic forces.[22] In a general sense, remediation is the re-distribution of a particular narrative from one to many forms. This redistribution often utilizes marketing techniques in an attempt to appeal to the full range of the subject's senses. For instance, many books or comic books are often remediated into film projects which also inspire the production of action figures, soundtrack CDs, and other merchandise.[23]

I argue that commercial websites in general provide working examples of how remediation distributes one narrative in a variety of forms. Online mothering

---

[21] Ibid, p. 53,

[22] Ibid, p.68.

[23] Ibid.

magazines are specific instances of how remediation disperses the narrative of maternity in cyber(cultural)space. Within this dynamic redistribution of a narrative of reproduction and childrearing, the search for the real, authentic experience, and "belonging" intersects with discourses of technology, commerce, and community.

In the following three sections I interrogate the speech and images of maternal bodies located in some electronic publications, websites and forums that deal with maternity and parenting issues. I argue that the actual bodies of the texts as well as the images of maternity contained within them are remediations of the formats and concerns of hard copy women's and parenting magazines. My argument includes an extension of Bolter and Grusin's notion of remediation to include not just form and media interactivity but also ideology as I contend that online maternity magazines also rework the content of their print counterparts. I investigate the various ways in which maternal e-zines rework the format and cultural concerns of parenting and women's print magazines. From these remediations of electronic publications I frame an examination of maternal bodies who inhabit these cyber dimensions. Within these explorations I trace the outlines of the techno-maternal subjects that emerge from the cyber remediations of motherly bodies.

Drawing upon the theories of Lury, Modelski and Gauntlett concerning the reading of mainstream texts I argue that maternity online magazines ultimately are paradoxes that encompass failure and success. These texts encourage a maternal gaze that is affected by a double bind of empowerment and containment. Maternity magazines and e-texts provide space for maternal voices that are often silenced, yet they also construct conventional representations of motherhood. Online, Gauntlett's "pick and mix" reader becomes the click and go participant who is technologically enabled to jump from one maternal "dreamworld" to another.[24] This "pick and mix" approach to online texts enables diverse representations of maternal bodies to rapidly be explored by reader/interactors.

Online mothering magazines also encourage the formation of maternity communities. As meeting places for a range of maternal bodies these virtual communities express a number of discourses of maternity and assist in the

---

[24] Gauntlett, *Media, Gender and Identity*, pp. 196-198. See also Stevens and Maclaran, 'Exploring the "Shopping Imaginary'.

construction of a range of maternal bodies. The virtual maternity communities investigated in my thesis raise questions about the form, workings and processes of community in general and specifically online maternal communities.

Online Communities

The word "community", like the term "maternity", is popularly invested with meanings that cohere around naturalized and commonsense notions of human desire for social and familial networks. The popular perception of human need to form and join groups infects much of the discussions concerning both offline and virtual communities.[25] The terms 'virtual community' and 'online community' both refer to groups, collectives or gatherings that regularly meet in cyber(cultural)space, generally with a specific purpose or goal. These groups share common discourses and practices. The shared narratives underpin reader/user notions of belonging to a group and assist in the development of social codes in the community. The construction of these social codes make explicit underlying assumptions regarding boundaries of discussion, behaviour, identity, and embodiment within online communities. Breaching of these boundaries can result in a variety of disciplining measures such as introducing registration for participants –to deal with negatives posts from anonymous sources – and vigilante behaviour.

Despite both terms "community" and "maternity" being overfreighted with the commonsensical and the natural, the movement of print maternity magazines into cyber(cultural)space complicates conventional notions and representations of maternal bodies. Diverse mixtures of immediacy, hypermediacy and anonyminity invest maternal online communities with an almost paradoxical set of qualities, attractions and capabilities. Virtual communities, especially the online groups based around maternity, are spaces of hypertexted contradictions where passionate loyalty, heated conflict, commerce, and political activism flicker throughout connections and disjunctions.

Print and online maternity and women's magazines market themselves by drawing upon notions of community, positioning the text as a "friend" whose chatty

---

[25] Barry Wellman and Milena Guila, "Virtual Communities as Communities: Net surfers Don't Ride Alone." In *Communities in Cyberspace* edited by Marc Smith and Peter Kollock. (London: Routledge, 1999), 168-194.

companionship encompasses advice and knowledge regarding issues ranging from personal relationships, beauty, health, fashion and celebrity gossip. These notions of community and friendship are one of the major attractions of online publications where the interactions of hypermediacy and immediacy throughout the Internet and the World Wide Web emphasize and intensify the appeal of communal belonging promoted by print magazines.

In order to further investigate online community formation and engagement I turn to cyber-theorists Howard Rheingold and David Bell. Rheingold was one of the first academics to participate in as well as offer critical commentary upon computer-mediated communication (CMC). His book *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (1993) not only first used the phrase "virtual community" it also remains one of the most influential texts in the field of cyberculture.[26] Rheingold promotes the notion of virtual communities as "naturally" occurring in the new territory of cyberspace as, he argues, these groups fill the void left by the decline of the contemporary RL community.[27] He suggests that "virtual communities" are thought of "as colonies of microorganisms that grow in petri dishes ... Whenever CMC technology becomes available to people anywhere, they inevitably build virtual communities with it, just as microorganisms inevitably create colonies."[28] This image is troubling in its association of online communities with bacteria or fungus as well as its essentialization of the virtual community. From this "organic" origin, Rheingold's description of virtual communities assumes that apart from immediacy of communication both online and RL community members bond through shared interests and "sufficient human feeling".[29] My investigation of virtual maternity communities suggests that the reality of online community formation and engagement is more complex than Rheingold allows in his analysis. I argue that Rheingold's concept of virtual community is based on fantasy and clouded by his desire for a particular kind of community. This desire is projected onto his theorizations about online community. When referring to the kind of fantasy projection that evokes Rheingold's notions of utopian virtual community, I use the term Rheingoldian community.

---

[26] Rheingold, *Virtual Communities.*

[27] Ibid, p. 418.

[28] Ibid, p. 6.

Noted author of a number of acclaimed texts on cybercultures, David Bell refutes Rheingold's conceptualization of virtual community as organic and natural.[30] Bell argues that the forces of globalization, disembedding (removal from), detraditionalization (moving away from traditional discourses) and reflexivity, encourage a contemporary form of online community that shifts beyond conventional ideas of communal groups and their expectations. He contends that globalization encourages the formation of online communities that potentially encompass the whole world. The author claims that in contemporary western society, humans, technologies, goods, and information move rapidly across the globe in many different and complicated ways so that people are not necessarily embedded in a particular place or local culture. Instead, they are disembedded or freed from ties to a specific location and enabled to move beyond limitations of geography while tapping into vast quantities or "global flows" of information.[31] Bell expands the argument by stating that these processes of globalization, disembeddedness and reflexivity enable subjects to challenge and detraditionalize or shift away from conventional forms, thus allowing the reconceptualization of new kinds of online communities. While Rheingold looks to a fantasy of an organically developing utopia to define the virtual community Bell describes online communities as places of constant change, difference and situational, often global, alliances.

Sherry Turkle's landmark study of online connections and relationships in her text, *Life on the Screen*, argues that RL and virtual communities offer a range of opportunities to the participant.[32] Turkle claims that online communities are beneficial to humans in a number of ways. She contends that virtual environments enable

---

[29] Ibid., p. 5.

[30] See Bell, *Cybercultures*; Bell, *Cyberculture: the Key Concepts*, (New York: Routledge, 2004); Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy, *The Cybercultures Reader*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2000); Bell and Kennedy, *The Cybercultures Reader*, 2nd Edition, (New York: Routledge, 2007); and Bell, *Cyberculture Theorists: Manuel Castells and Donna Haraway*, (London: Routledge, 2007).

[31] Bell, *Cybercultures,* pp.95-97.

[32] Sherry Turkle, *Life on Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

viewer/users to play with identity.[33] According to Turkle these online communities also enable users to explore and resolve personal issues in a "safe" environment.

In a move that couples the idealized notion of virtual communites with the acknowledged commercial capabilities of cyber(cultural)space Cliff Figallo, Internet commentator and second director of the WELL, defines the online community as one that is built from a "natural" human desire for connection which "naturally" translates into business opportunities.[34] He argues that businesses benefit indirectly from the creation of online communities just as well-thought out public relations and/or marketing schemes in cyber(cultural)space have positive spin offs in RL commerce. Figallo claims that website owners need to develop communities that permit relationships to emerge and strengthen between businesses and users.[35] To Figallo, the essential ingredient for a successful merging of community and business is the ongoing return of the user whose needs are being met as they continue to revisit and consume on, through and by the site.[36] Considering Figallo's arguments and the plethora of advertisements and commercial opportunities scattered throughout the Net I argue that community and profit are becoming firmly located in the popular imaginary as twin essential elements of online life.

The Net and the Web, however, are not purely domains of commercially inflected activity that coheres around notions of community. Qualities of immediacy and hypermediacy construct spaces conducive to communities that are not bound solely to the commercial but also rally around ideas concerned with the political. Activism in cyber(cultural)space is potentially a workable alternative to RL politics that neglect grassroots community concerns. Online activism is potentially a force to enable ongoing political changes. Barbara Creed argues that the virtual subject is enabled by the dynamic and fluid online environment to become a "global self" which is "a virtual, transformative and empowered self with a global, political and social

---

[33] Turkle, "Virtuality and its Discontents: Searching for Community in Cyberspace."Adapted from *Life on the Screen* by Sherry Turkle Reprinted by permission of Simon and Schuster (1995). *American Prospect*, available at http://www.prospect.org/print/V7/24/turkle-s.html Accessed Wednesday, 29th June, 2005.

[34] Cliff Figallo, *Hosting Web Communities: Building Relationships, Increasing Customer Loyalty, and Maintaining a Competitive Edge,* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1998), pp. 10-13.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

agenda".[37] Creed's argument positions new media technologies such as the Net as productive facilitators of political action. This standpoint is an important rebuttal of criticisms which depict online domains as superficially commercial and intent upon luring subjects away from the often complicated business of RL communication and living practices.

In her article, 'Virtual Activists: Women and the Making of Identities of Disability', Helen Meekosha examines a working example of an online community organised around political action. Meekosha outlines the growing online involvement of a feminist disability rights group: Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA). She states that online activism is a means by which members of WWDA are able to work as political activists in order to effect positive change for those with disabilities at the level of the individual subject as well as the state. Meekosha writes that

> The networks of women with disabilities have grown with the opportunities for "virtual community". They have begun to create communities of the imagination, where they are welcomed for their capacities rather than excluded for their incapacities. While being "virtual", these "imagined" communities work to produce spaces that celebrate possibilities in the lives of women."[38]

Instead of concentrating on the conceptualisation of communities as closed groups, I focus on the fluidity of online groups. In the maternity websites I examine in this chapter, reader/interactors (maternal cyber-citizens) make up online groups in fragmented, knowledgable and playful ways. I argue that reader/users, like Gauntlett's pick and mix reader, who could be called the hypertext reader in cyber(cultural)space, click in and out of online communities. Their subjectivity is consequently fractured along the fault lines of desire and need for information. While this fluidity enables rapid click-linking to sites that range from commercial to humorous to political, commonalities amongst reader/interactors enable physically dispersed maternal bodies to connect in online communities. The heady mixture of (almost) always available community and anonyminity produce fierce loyalties (Rheingold) and intense disagreements, commercial enterprise (Figallo) and political activisim (Meekosha)

---

[37] Barbara Creed, *Media Matrix: Sexing the New Reality*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2002), p. 194.

[38] Helen Meekosha, 'Virtual Activists? Women and the Making of Identities of Disability', *Hypatia*,17, 3 Summer (2002,); 67-88.

hypertexted together. The maternity sites I explore replicate the grounding of RL communities in geography while they also open up (cyber)space to articulate the experiences of maternal bodies that some find difficult to utter in face to face situations.

For a further exploration of the extents and limitations of online maternity communities and the types of maternal bodies constructed by these e-texts I first turn to an investigation of commercial maternity websites. This section is followed by investigations of community and maternity in the *BMC* and *Hip Mama* websites.

Buy-Right Mums

Commercial maternity online sites are texts of paradox that both construct and challenge representations of conventional maternity through the mobilization of narratives of techno-medicalisation, information gain and consumption. Throughout these websites maternal bodies are positioned in terms of a particular niche market of women who are urged to consume specialized goods and services in order to maintain the health and well-being of their own selves and their fetus/child(ren). According to the dominant narratives of these commodity-driven e-texts, the *doing* and *being* of maternity involves the buying of maternity-oriented products and services. Due to their immersion in cyber-flows of consumption, new technologies and convention I call the maternal bodies constructed by these commercial websites the Buy-Right Mums (subsequently referred to as BR Mums). These cyber-maternal bodies are chiefly depicted as being pregnant or concerned with the care of babies, toddlers or young children. Images of fathers are largely absent – the few that occur are associated with play. Narratives of nature, traditional maternity, and juggling inflect this representation. Discourses of the natural, however, are immediately disrupted by the BR Mum's implication in webs of technology.

In this section, I investigate the ways in which the BR Mums in three websites – *Americanbaby* (Figure 1, p 87)[39], *BabyCenter* (Figure 2, p 88)[40] and *Maternitymall.com* (Figure 3, p 89)[41] - traverse the webs of techno-medicalisation, desire and consumption in cyber(cultural)space.[42] First, I turn to Kim Sawchuk's theory of biotourism to examine discourses of medico-technology.[43] Then I extend

---

[39] Figure 1: Americanbaby Mainpage sourced from http://www.parents.com/american-baby-magazine/ date accessed 21/10/09

[40] Figure 2: BabyCenter (US) Mainpage sourced from http://www.babycenter.com/ date accessed 21/10/09

[41] Figure 3: Maternitymall Mainpage sourced from http://www.destinationmaternity.com/ date accessed 21/10/09

[42] When I had completed the majority of research into the commercial websites and prior to submission *Maternitymall*'s homepage layout was altered. Instead of directly linking to maternity community forums, *Maternitymall* now links to a site called *Destination Maternity* (owned by the same company) which links to the forum in question. *Maternitymall* still links to community forums but it is a once removed step instead of the direct route the links used to follow.

[43] Kim Sawchuk, 'Biotourism, *Fantastic Voyage*, and Sublime Inner Space', in *Wild Science: Reading Feminism, Medicine and the Media*, edited by Janine Marchessault and Kim Sawchuk, (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp 9-23.

Pages 87-89 have been removed for copyright or proprietary reasons.

Figure 1: Americanbaby Mainpage sourced from http:// www.parents.com/american-babymagazine/ date accessed 21/10/09
Figure 2: BabyCenter (US) Mainpage sourced from http:// wvvw.babycenter.com/ date accessed 21/10/09
Figure 3: Maternitymall Mainpage sourced from http:// www.destinationmatern ity.com/date accessed 21/10/09

Lorna Stevens and Pauline Maclaran's notion of the shopping imaginary and dreamworld into cyber(cultural)space in order to examine the ways in the BR Mums are constructed and contained by discourses of consumption.[44] Finally I explore the communities that shape and sustain the BR Mums.

Americanbaby is the online version of the print magazine *American Baby.*"[45] It is a cyber-remediation of the print medium which is made explicit in the framing of the website. Logos advertising mainstream women magazines *Better Homes, Country Home,* and *Family Circle* form a strip at the bottom of the home page. On the *Americanbaby* website there is a mix of information concerning health issues for pregnant women and infants and advertisements for a variety of relevant products and services. This intertwining of information and commerce is representative of most online maternity resources.

While *Americanbaby* is a direct remediation of mainstream women's magazines, *Maternitymall.com* is the online diversification of the United States company Mothers Work, Inc. This website was founded in 1981 by businesswoman Rebecca Matthias who perceived a gap in the retailing of maternity clothes. She set up a mail-order catalogue business which later expanded into a multi-million dollar venture.[46] Mothers Work, Inc makes its products available online through the cluster of web sites linked to *Maternitymall.com* which remediates RL shopping centres in a cyberimaginary mall. From brand specific websites, *Maternitymall.com* sells maternity apparel, breastfeeding equipment and accessories, fertility related items, pregnancy books, as well as maternal health and nutritional products.

---

[44] Lorna Stevens and Pauline Maclaran, 'Exploring the "shopping imaginary": The Dreamworld of Women's Magazines', *Journal of Consumer Behaviour,* 4, 4 June (2005) pp 282-292.

[45] *Americanbaby* is described as "the place to reach expectant mothers and new parents. The site provides parents with daily updates and deep and rich content that is served to each user by her stage in parenting". *Americanbaby.com, Meredith Interactive, The Home and Family Network,* available at http://www.americanbaby.com/mediakit/web/mediakit.jhtml, date accessed 08/09/07.

[46] Mothers Work, Inc, Company Profile Snapshot, *WrightReports,* Wright Investors' Service, available http://wrightreports.ecnext.com/com2/reportdesc_COMPANY_619903107, date accessed 04/09/07. Online, the Mothers Work website proclaims it is "the world's largest designer and retailer of maternity apparel "and "a specialty retail leader born of humble beginnings" who aims "to give the customer what she wants when she wants it." Mothers Work Inc, home page, available http://motherswork.com/Home.asp, date accessed 04/09/07. See also Mothers Work Inc, 'Who are we', available at http://www.motherswork.som/Whoarewe.asp, date accessed 04/09/07.

BabyCenter is one of the most well-known maternity websites catering for new and expectant mothers.[47] The recipient of a number of awards for content and services, *BabyCenter* achieves high rankings in surveys of online customer loyalty.[48] Its rapid expansion encompasses a British and an Australian website.[49] Owned by multinational giant Johnson & Johnson, *BabyCenter* was established in 1998 and originally owned by the company e-Toys, Inc.[50] *BabyCenter*, like *Americanbaby*, offers a range of products and services relevant to pregnancy, infants and child rearing.

BabyCenter, Maternitymall.com, and *Americanbaby* all follow a similar layout remediated from hard copy maternity magazines such as *Pregnancy Magazine* and *Mother and Baby*. Generally, the design of these texts includes sections that deal with fertility (preconception), pregnancy, merchandise, "expert advice", feature articles, as well as forums that encourage community building. In addition to information from "experts", the maternity websites feature advertisements for products by multinational companies such as Johnson & Johnson, Nestle and Hasbro. Rapid linking to a diversity of information, products and services enables the construction of the BR Mum as the informed consumer of technology and medicalized knowledge, and participant in idealized notions of community.

BR Mums – Biotourists Pregnant with their own potential

Both hard copy and online maternity magazines construct maternal bodies as inevitably implicated in narratives of medicalised technology. As I have outlined in

---

47 'Johnson & Johnson Acquires BabyCenter From eToys, Inc. Leading Online Destination for Parents Plans for Continued Expansion of Operations', *Johnson & Johnson*, New Brunswick, N.J., March 2, 2001, available at http://www.investor.jnj.com/releaseDetail.cfm?ReleaseID=63836, accessed 05/09/07.

48 Ibid.

49 *BabyCentre.co.uk* (http://www.babycentre.co.uk), *BabyCentre* (Australia - http://www.babycenter.com.au/) and a parenting site - ParentCenter.com (http://www.parentcenter.com).

50 Ibid. Multinational company Johnson & Johnson is an international provider of health care products, services and devices. *BabyCenter* was established in 1998 and originally owned by the company e-Toys, Inc. *BabyCenter*'s General Manager (2001), Mari Baker claimed at the time the company acquired the website, "BabyCenter and Johnson & Johnson share a commitment to help parents raise healthy kids". On acquisition, Johsnon & Johnson's Chairperson, Christian Koffman stated that the company "was attracted to the superior content and personalized relationship that *BabyCenter*, as the leading online parenting brand, has created with millions of parents from conception through childhood". 'Johnson & Johnson Acquires BabyCenter From eToys, Inc.

the previous chapter feminist theorists identify both controlling and empowering threads concerning the increasing medicalicalization of reproductive processes.[51] These restrictive and enabling narratives are also evident in the ways that techno-science represents the maternal body and the fetus.[52]

Contemporary biomedical science constructs the maternal body as a location for scientific interventions. These images, acts and processes are increasingly shifting from the medical realm to that of the public domain via conduits of popular culture such as film, television, magazines and websites. The meanings expressed by these images are dramatically changing.[53] In the BR Mum websites, the public and popularized viewing of previously private and invisible body parts is framed in terms of consumption and entertainment. The proliferation of a range of software such as the electronic ovulation predictor and pregnancy tracker devices in BR Mum websites both fuels and testifies to maternal desire to travel through the imaginary landscape of fetal territory.

The electronic ovulation predictor is software that assists the user to pinpoint the most likely time of ovulation in order to conceive. The user types in the date of the first day of their last period and the software calculates the time of ovulation. The websites usually state that the ovulation predictor gives approximate rather than

---

[51] For examples of the feminist literature on this topic see Rosalind.P Petchesky, 'Foetal images: the power of visual culture in the politics of reproduction', in Gill Kirkup, Linda Janes, Kath Woodward and Fiona Hovenden (eds) *The Gendered Cyborg: a Reader*, (London: Routledge, 2000). p. 181; Lisa M. Mitchell and Eugenia Georges, "Baby's First Picture: the Cyborg Fetus of Ultrasound Imaging." in *Cyborg Babies: from Techno-sex to Techno-tots*, edited by Robbie Davis-Floyd and Joseph Dumit. (London: Routledge, 1998), 105-124; Emily Martin, *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction*, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1987); Ann Oakley, *Becoming a Mother*, (Oxford: Martin Robertson & Company Ltd, 1980); Anne Balsamo, "Public Pregnancies and Cultural Narratives of Surveillance." in *Revisioning Women, Health, and Healing: Feminist, Cultural, and Technoscience Perspectives*, edited by Adele Clarke and Virginia L. Olesen. (New York: Routledge, 1996), 231-253; Barbara Duden *Disembodying Women: Perspectives on Pregnancy and the Unborn*, trans. L. Hoinacki, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) and Jana Sawicki, "Disciplining Mothers: Feminism and the New Reproductive Technologies." in *Feminist Theory and the Body*, edited by Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 190-202.

[52] See previous note for examples of feminist writings on technoscience, reproduction and reproductive technologies.

[53] Bell, *Cybercultures*, p. 58 and Anne Beaulieu. "The Brain at the End of the Rainbow: the Promises of Brain Scans in the Research Field and in the Media." In *Wild Science: Reading Feminism, Medicine and the Media*, edited by Janine Marchessault and Kim Sawchuk. (London: Routledge, 2000), 39-52.

completely accurate dates and refers users to other pages to assist in determining ovulation dates by other means such as the monitoring of temperature and/or mucus. Pregnancy Trackers are either newsletters delivered by email or Web pages that describe in images and straightforward text, how the fetus develops every week. *BabyCenter* offers a service to readers who type their email address and "due date" into a section headed 'Your Pregnancy – Week by Week' to receive a weekly email with information about fetal development. This weekly description of fetal growth is also available by clicking on the links under the main heading – 'You and your baby's health' and the sub-headings 'Pregnancy Week by Week' and 'Your Growing Baby' (Figures 4, 5 and 6 pp 94-96)[54]. To the left of descriptive text ("Your baby is now the size of a kidney bean") links take the reader/interactor to further information and products.[55]

Throughout the entries the fetus is referred to as "your baby" in light-hearted comments that insist on fetal subjectivity.[56] *BabyCenter* and *Maternitymall* offer the service of ultrasound uploaders which enable the images to be viewed by geographically distant family and friends.[57] Cyber-constructions of fetal subjectivities are emphasized by the positioning of these ultrasound images of fetuses next to photographs of newborn babies. The uploading of these images remediates print magazines' fascination with publishing baby photographs. The ability to rapidly upload and view different fetuses marks fetal personhood as immediate global

---

[54] Figure 4: BabyCenter Pregnancy Tracker -'Your Pregnancy, Week by Week' sourced from http://www.babycenter.com/pregnancy, date accessed 21/10/09.

Figure 5: BabyCenter, Pregnancy Tracker, Week 12 sourced from http://www.babycenter.com/303_12-weeks_1615700.bc date accessed 21/10/09.

Figure 6: Pregnancy Tracker, 'What Your Baby Looks Like at 28 Weeks' sourced from http://www.babycenter.com/fetal-development-images-28-weeks , date accessed 21/10/09.

[55] *BabyCenter,* available at http://www.babycenter.com/pregnancy-fetal-development-index, accessed 02/08/07.

[56] For instance, an entry for Week Ten states "your baby will begin to move. Of course your baby will be too tiny for you to feel anything, but rest assured he or she is doing a little dance in your uterus." 'Your pregnancy, Week ten', available at http://www.maternitymall.com/homeMInfo.asp?SelectCase=Article&CategoryId=8&PageLp=1&ArticleId=465&SubCategoryId=40, date accessed 25/2/08.

[57] *Maternitymall*'s software is capable of taking the ultrasound images offered and, "in three easy steps" broadcasting those pictures over the Internet. In this instance, maternal bodies are restricted to the dark or foggy backgrounds of the ultrasound image.

Pages 94-96 have been removed for copyright or proprietary reasons.

Figure 4: BabyCenter Pregnancy Tracker -'Your Pregnancy, Week by Week' sourced from http://www.babycenter.com/pregnancy, date accessed 21/10/09.

Figure 5: BabyCenter, Pregnancy Tracker, Week 12 sourced from http://www.babycenter.com/303 12-weeks_1615700.bc date accessed 21/10/09.

Figure 6: Pregnancy Tracker, 'What Your Baby Looks Like at 28 Weeks' sourced from http://www.babycenter.com/fetal-development-images-28-weeks , date accessed 21/10/09.

spectacle, an iconic presence representing "life"[58] whose personal needs must necessarily take precedence over those of the maternal body.

This desire to explore the inner workings of the human body rests more and more upon the advances of technology and technological/medical interventions. In these websites there is a sense of wonder at the revelation of the formerly hidden inner workings of the body and amazement at the technology that enables glimpses into previously veiled territory. The combination of voyeuristic pleasure and the desire for more knowledge combine in an amalgam of technoscientific intervention, spectacle and the pleasure of looking.

A useful frame of reference for understanding this phenomenon is Kim Sawchuk's notion of biotourism.[59] The term biotourism (or "anatomical entertainments") refers to the popularized fantasy that technologically mediated images of bodies' inner workings render a physical landscape that is able to be mapped and traversed.[60] As with most forms of tourism, biotourism is dependent on the seductive promise of new frontiers to be viewed and/or polished images of terrain to be traversed. Unlike geographical tourism, however, biotourism offers the lure of explorations of technological innovations, public spectacle and the investigation of our own inner bodies. Sawchuk argues that "In this complicated tangle of political, economic, cultural and technological discourses a new facet of human subjectivity is being spawned – the biotourist".[61] In her consideration of biotourism Sawchuk states that

> ... what intrigues me now is the limitations (which I once found kind of wondrous and fascinating: the inside being turned out, and the outside in) of these kinds of scalings ... there is a kind of reductionism at work in these displays, which I think ends up curtailing one's imaginary journey through these fictionalized inner spaces.[62]

The idea of biotourism both extends and plays with feminist critiques of the increasing techno-medicalization of pregnancy, labour and child rearing. Maternal biotourists in cyber(cultural)space derive information and consolidate narratives of

---

[58] See Duden *Disembodying Women* and Stabile, *Feminism and the Technological Fix*..

[59] Sawchuk, 'Biotourism', (2000), pp 9-23.

[60] Ibid, p. 10.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

family from facilities like the Pregnancy Tracker.[63] These biotourists, however, are also (self)subjected to (self)scrutiny and constraining behaviours that privilege the fetus as the cyber and medico- technologies involved are complicit in the construction rather than the representation of maternal bodies.[64] The hypermediated features of websites emphasize the severance from material context that accompanies the diagrams and images. Hypermediated immediate access to chatty text and medicalised cross-sections of pregnant torsos (see Figure 6, p 96) intensifies the biotouristic notion that bodies, in all their complexities are able to be reduced to simple drawings, described in medical terms and rendered through technological means as easily accessible commercialized entertainments.

I argue that the uneasy melding of biological information, public entertainment and commerce that drives the BR Mums' biotourism paradoxically intensifies reinscriptions of medicalised motherhood yet opens up (limited) space for mothers to author their own narratives of maternity. The cyber-maternal bodies constructed by *BabyCenter*, *Americanbaby* and *Maternitymall* are addressed as biotourists who consume technological narratives of proper material maternity. While print magazines render representations of the outer and inner workings of pregnant bodies, the BR Mums sites make use of the hypermediacy and immediacy of cyber(cultural)space to link images of maternal flesh and fetuses to medical information and commercial products. The text and images describing the fetus focus on growth and development whereas the information for pregnant women is directive, advocating specific behaviours and consumption patterns. From the promotion of specific products - vitamin tablets, certain fruits, stretch-mark creams, maternity clothes and diverse ranges of goods and services for babies and children – links direct the viewer/user to Web pages where these items are able to be purchased.

In turn, a didactic biotourism fuels the notion of compliant maternal bodies in need of techno-medical interventions. Common assumptions expressed in the e-texts concern the routine accessing of ultrasounds and the male gender of medical authorities. Throughout the Tracker, maternal bodies are often exhorted to "Ask your healthcare provider what *he* thinks is best" (my emphasis) in order to determine a

---

[63] Petchesky, 'Foetal Images'.

[64] Bell, *Cybercultures*, pp. 58-59.

course of action."[65] These narratives of normalised male-dominated techno-medicalisation combined with the entertainment factor of biotourism emphasize the imperatives of maternal (self)surveillance and (self)control. These directives are delivered in a light-hearted manner in order to soften the prescriptiveness of the BR Mum sites and encourage the notion of "choice" – a mantra of maternity texts. For example, the *Maternitymall* Tracker cheerfully admonishes: "Do not forget that no question is too small or too silly. Ask away, it is your job as a mother and his or her as health care provider."[66]

The BR Mum sites' emphasis on a combination of techno-medical knowledge and prescriptive, lightly entertaining description ignores the maternal body's phenomenological experience of pregnancy. In these Web pages there is little acknowledgement of the maternal body's embodiment and experience of pregnancy. For instance, *BabyCenter*'s section titled 'Your Pregnancy', focuses on fetal development and size (from grape to pumpkin), and maternal medical symptoms. Only a few mentions are made of maternal experiences of pregnancy – at Week 10 the motherbody is referred to in jocular terms as an "emotional pinball".[67] Labor and birth are also described using medical terms giving the impression that they will be predictable and controlled experiences. I suggest that this reliance on medical explanation and authority that erases maternal experience would leave those women whose labours and births are unpredictable and uncontrolled feeling cheated and like failures. As feminist theorist, Jane Maher states, medical discourses of pregnancy and childbirth construct practices and cultures that are inadequate to fully account for the lived experiences of labour and birth.[68]

Throughout the *Maternitymall* and *BabyCenter* Pregnancy Trackers maternal flesh is erased in visual image but foregrounded by narratives of control and discipline. In

---

[65] *BabyCenter*, 'Your pregnancy, Week 40', available at http://www.maternitymall.com/homeMInfo.asp?SelectCase=Article&CategoryId=8&PageLp=1&ArticleId=495&SubCategoryId=46, date accessed, 25/2/08.

[66] *Maternitymall*, 'Fetal Development: Your Pregnancy – Week 22', available at http://www.destinationmaternity.com/homeMInfo.asp?SelectCase=Article&CategoryId=104&PageLp=1&ArticleId=613&SubCategoryId=1016&PagelocationId=5, date accessed 2/1/07.

[67] *BabyCenter*, 'Your Pregnancy, Week 9', available at http://www.babycenter.com/6_your-pregnancy-9-weeks_1098.bc, date accessed, 28/1/08.

[68] JaneMaree Maher. "Rethinking Women's Birth Experience: Medical Frameworks and Personal Narratives." *Hecate*, 29, 2 (2003): 140-153.

these sites motherbodies are constructed as figures of potential abjection and excess. These discourses are focused around "appropriate" weight gain for pregnant maternal bodies. For instance, a *BabyCenter* article, 'Extra pounds gained in pregnancy can pose problems' is typical of this attitude of surveillance and control.[69] The implication in this mantra of correct weight gain is that the fetus needs to be nurtured and assisted to flourish while the maternal body must be regulated so that it does not exceed medically agreed upon limits of fleshiness. Pregnant flesh is always described on these sites as potentially abject and monstrous if the proper surveillance and action is not taken. The duplicitously intransigent pregnant body occupies space just a click away from a globalised shopping dreamworld of products (anti-stretchmark creams, moisturizers, maternity bras, clothes to flatter the "bump") and processes (self-help maternity books and magazines) that supposedly assist in the (self)surveillance and (self)control of the body. In the world of the BR Mum, technologically-enabled consumption is the vital element that enables the pregnant body to consume the authorized knowledge, discourses and products to create the *good* mother and healthy fetus.

Despite these serious criticisms of maternal biotourism on the BR Mum sites, the ubiquitous images of fetuses are empowering for women in claiming space (however limited) for their own stories about motherhood as well as upholding their traditional place as family record keepers.[70] The sites' uploading facilities shift the task of keeping records into the public realm of cyber(cultural)space where potentially huge audiences are able to access these formerly private images. On *BabyCenter* and

---

[69] For examples of articles about weight gain and loss during and after pregnancy in the BR Mums sites see the following: Serena Gordon, 'Extra pounds gained during pregnancy can pose problems', Saturday, April 19th 2008; *BabyCenter*, available at http://www.babycenter.com/204_extra-pounds-gained-in-pregnancy-can-pose-problems_5231315.bc, date accessed 20/5/08; 'How much weight gain is due to baby?'; *Maternitymall*, available at http://www.destinationmaternity.com/homeMInfo.asp?SelectCase=Article&CategoryId=5&PageLp=1&ArticleId=344&SubCategoryId=26&PagelocationId=, date accessed 19/5/08; and, *Americanbaby* devotes a whole section to 'Weight Gain Guidelines – How many pounds should you be gaining, and when?', available at http://www.parents.com/pregnancy/my-body/nutrition/, date accessed 19/6/08 and the site also has a section on postpartum weight loss, 'Losing the Baby Weight' available at http://www.parents.com/baby/health/lose-baby-weight/, date accessed 19/6/08.

[70] Tess Cosslett, *Women Writing Childbirth: Modern Discourses of Motherhood*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994) and Petchesky, 'Foetal Images' These uploading components of the websites extend Petchesky's notion of the woman as the one who maintains family memories.

Maternitymall, mothers upload their own images and relate their narrative rather than having others tell the stories.[71] These uploadings also are enablings of maternal bodies negotiating contemporary technologies. In this instance, the BR Mums are the techno-savy publishers of a part of their own reproductive journeys.

The anonymous authors of the Pregnancy Trackers, however, remediate the cheerful tone and medicalised content of print maternity magazines underscoring the meaning of the Trackers as information combined with entertainment. This combination of upbeat prose and techno-medicalised discourse encourages biotouristic desire for easily digestible bytes of information. For example, in the *Maternitymall* entry for week eleven the pregnant body is described as "Hotel Mommy".[72] Next to a Johnson & Johnson advertisement featuring a photograph of newborn baby, *BabyCenter*'s Week 11 entry includes a diagram of a pregnant torso with an enlargement of the image of the fetus labeled with medical jargon - uterine cavity, amniotic sac, umbilical cord, placenta (Figure 7, p 102).[73] This constellation of narratives – diagrams of pregnant torsos, medical jargon, and snippets of biomedical knowledge delivered in chatty expressions accessed immediately by hypermediated means – reduces the complexities inherent in the biological processes, desires, and understandings of pregnant bodies to simplistic, standardized and medically authorized information presented as lighthearted entertainment. This reduction of a matrix of materiality and desire to biotouristic spectacle trivializes maternal bodies and their reproductive processes rendering them as curiosities to be consumed alongside a range of products and services marketed for babies and mothers.-

While the Trackers' lighthearted tone, language and simple depictions of pregnant bodies offer straightforwardly appealing information and access to products that may be helpful, I argue that the general effect is one of limiting and controlling rather than opening up possibilities. The prescriptiveness of the maternal biotourism in the

---

[71] Cosslett, *Women Writing Childbirth*, (1994).

[72] 'Your pregnancy, Week 11' available at http://www.maternitymall.com/homeMInfo.asp?SelectCase=ArticleList&CategoryId=8&PageLp=1&SubCategoryId=41, date accessed 25/2/08.

[73] *BabyCenter*, 'What your baby looks like – 11 Weeks', available at http://www.babycenter.com/fetal-development-images-11-weeks, date accessed 26/2/07.

Figure 7: BabyCenter "Your pregnancy: 11 weeks", sourced from http://www.babycenter.com/6_your-pregnancy-11-weeks_1100.bc, date accessed 21/10/09.

Page 102 has been removed for copyright or proprietary reasons.

Figure 7: BabyCenter "Your pregnancy: 11 weeks, sourced from http://www.babycenter.com/6 yourpregnancy-11-weeks 1100.bc date accessed 21/10/09.

Pregnancy Trackers reduces difference to a generic textbook-like generality. Specificities of maternal situatedness are swept aside. Just as feminist critics argue that an emphasis on images of the fetus tend to erase the maternal body,[74] the bland cross-sections of motherly torsos in the BR Mum sites render motherbodies as blank space. I argue that on the BR Mum sites, the combination of motherbodies made invisible and the jocular descriptions of these corporealities construct maternal bodies as biotourists and humorous, entertaining absences that need to carefully control and manage the threat of themselves. They look to the authority of medical experts to receive medically-sanctioned knowledge via technological innovation as all the answers to questions of pregnancy and childrearing are perceived to lie outside the maternal body. In the BR Mum sites, the pregnant and/or maternal body becomes a conduit of consumption and the fetus is the perfected product.

You are what you buy – A Buy Right Mum

In the BR Mum sites, threads of medicalized technology, surveillance, community, conventional maternity and ruptures of these traditional narratives are entangled in webs of consumption. With the almost overwhelming array of products available globally, the plethora of commercial maternity websites enable cybersurfing maternal bodies to extend David Gauntlett's notion of the pick and mix reader[75] to hypermediated heights. Drawing on Lorna Stevens and Pauline Maclaran's notion of women's magazines as dreamworlds in a shopping imaginary,[76] I argue that this cyber incarnation of the flick and peruse reader of print magazines produces a maternal gaze that consumes the goods and services displayed in the commercial maternity sites in a multitude of ways.

BR Mum sites are easy to read and navigate through as they remediate women's print magazines in their layout, content and style. They are replete with glossy images of wide-eyed babies/toddlers/children and adult models demonstrating products such as strollers, highchairs, cots, maternity bras and the latest maternal fashions. Products

---

[74] Petchesky, 'Foetal images'. See also Duden *Disembodying Women;* Sawicki, 'Disciplining Mothers; and Carol Stabile, *Feminism and the Technological Fix*, (New York: Manchester University Press, 1994).

[75] David Gauntlett, *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 183-185.

are generally depicted with enhanced colours and the display usually includes prices, a description, and some form of rating system conducted by experts and/or community members. Each Web page within the BR Mum site features at least one advertisement usually for baby products, holidays or fashion for mothers and children.

Just as hard copy and cyber publications provide space for maternity narratives of lived experience, there are correlations between readers' consumption of print and online magazines. Readers of women's magazines talk of the ease of "flicking" and "dipping" into the text[77] while the immediacy of click-linking epitomizes the ease of online navigation. In a culture where the dominant metaphor for motherhood is currently that of the "juggling" mother who needs to "balance" her responsibilities to work and family[78], it would be difficult to overestimate the pleasure and ease of browsing a plethora of websites, choosing, then rapidly buying products. Online shopping allows immediate access to an enormous range of products without the inconveniences of RL shopping – parking/transport, queues, set opening hours and crowds.

In remediations of print magazines the BR Mum sites construct pregnancy and post-pregnancy maternity as periods necessitating vigilant and discerning the consumption of food. These sites focus on three main areas – convenience, maternal responsibility and safety. Narratives of time-pressured maternity responsible for domestic duties are reinforced regarding the consumption of food products on BR Mum sites. The word "easy" features in all three BR Mum websites' articles and advertisements focusing on food. Similarly, the phrase "quick and healthy" is mentioned three times in the heading links of *BabyCenter*'s section on food, recipes and nutrition. *Americanbaby* promotes Mini Wheats as "easy breakfast cereals". The consumption of Mini Wheats is also linked to children's academic welfare which

---

[76] See Ballaster et al, *Women's Worlds*, (1991), p. 115 for a discussion of the strong interlinking of advertising and women's magazines.

[77] Lorna Stevens, Pauline Maclaran, 'Exploring the "shopping imaginary": The dreamworld of women's magazines', *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 4, 4 June (2005), Vol. 4, p 288.

[78] Ibid, p. 285.

neatly combines narratives of maternal domestic responsibility, consumption and middle-class notions of success associated with academic achievment.[79]

While food prepared by mothers is portrayed as convenient on the BR Mum sites, their own particular consumption is depicted as moral acts of maternal love which demonstrate their self-discipline and sound character. This notion of assuming control of your life by the restriction of food is ubiquitous in western culture. Research concerning the illness of anorexia states that subjects who desire to exert some control over their bodies and lives feel that this is possible by a rigidly monitored denial of food.[80] The culturally prevalent idea in the west proclaims that if women follow strict guidelines, consuming specific amounts of certain foods, vitamin and other supplements as well as doing prescribed exercises, they will achieve a positive outcome.

The linking of maternal consumption and positive outcomes is constantly discussed and reinforced in BR Mum websites. For example, *BabyCenter* presents the article 'Eating fish while pregnant may make smarter kids' as a news item backed up by scientific research.[81] *BabyCenter* urges pregnant bodies to "Fine tune your diet – even if you already eat well" recommending taking vitamins (linked to Google advertisements promoting various supplements) in order to maintain fetal health.[82] Viewer/users are also advised against consuming a variety of foods and drinks. For instance, *BabyCenter* participants are warned "java junkies beware: Some studies suggest that drinking more than four cups of coffee a day can lead to miscarriage, low birth weight and even stillbirth."[83] *Maternitymall* and *Americanbaby* also support

---

[79] "Hey Moms, want three easy steps to setting your kids up for success at school?','Food and Recipes', available at http://www.parents.com/recipes/, date accessed 27/2/08.

[80] Susan Bordo, 'Are Mothers Persons: Reproductive Rights and the Politics of Subjectivity' in *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*, by Susan Bordo. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, 71-98.

[81] *BabyCenter*, 'Eating fish while pregnant may make smarter kids' *BabyCenter News*, available at http://www.babycenter.com/204_eating-fish-while-pregnant-may-make-smarter-kids_5230625.bc, date accessed 3/5/08.

[82] *BabyCenter*, 'Seven principles to eating well during pregnancy', available at http://www.babycenter.com/0_seven-principles-to-eating-well-during-pregnancy_3561.bc, date accessed 2/6/08.

[83] *BabyCenter*, 'Seven principles to eating well during pregnancy', available at http://www.babycenter.com/0_seven-principles-to-eating-well-during-pregnancy_3561.bc, date accessed 2/6/08. After listing other products in which caffeine "lurks" the site urges pregnant bodies to "switch to decaf".

these rigid prohibitions.[84] This emphasis on consuming what is beneficial for the "baby"encourages the construction of fetus and mother as separate entities with different and sometimes conflicting needs.

BR Mum sites also subject post-pregnancy maternal bodies to a high level of surveillance and control. *Americanbaby* focuses on regulating maternal bodies with titles like 'Outwit your appetite' and '10 fat fighting secrets'.[85] Similarly, *BabyCenter* links pregnancy with post-labour maternity assuming that women will have problematic relationships with food. An article titled 'Free to be me' states – "Just as pregnancy inspires some women to eat more healthfully, motherhood can provide an opportunity to forge a new identity around food."[86] *Americanbaby* mobilizes narratives of celebrity maternity, condemning the rapid post-partum weight loss of various Hollywood actresses while reinforcing the notion that it is a moral imperative for mothers to control their bodies and consumptions to benefit the baby/child. For example, *Americanbaby* quotes celebrity mother Nancy O'Dell as saying "Eating healthy is easier. I don't want to eat anything that will affect my breastmilk".[87]

During pregnancy and throughout motherhood women not only become niche market consumers of information and products for themselves, they also buy goods for the "baby" which feminist critic, Janelle Taylor describes as "consuming on the behalf

---

[84] Examples of this strict regulation are *Maternitymall*'s complete rejection of alcohol consumption for pregnant women and *Americanbaby* divides food into various categories – red light (avoid), yellow light (judicious use), green light (no restrictions). See *Maternitymall*, 'Nutrition – Fetal Alcohol Syndrome', available at http://www.destinationmaternity.com/homeMInfo.asp?SelectCase=Article&CategoryId=102&PageLp=1&ArticleId=554&SubCategoryId=1010&PagelocationId=5, date accessed 4/5/08. See also Sally Kuzemchak, 'A Food Guide for Pregnant Women' *Americanbaby,* http://www.parents.com/pregnancy/my-body/nutrition/a-food-guide-for-pregnant-women/, date accessed 5/6/08.

[85] Sandra Gordon, 'Outwit your appetite', *Americanbaby*, available at http://www.parents.com/family-life/fitness/weight-loss/outwit-your-appetite/, date accessed 5/5/08.

[86] Leslie Crawford and Sierra Senyak, 'The new-mom body survey: 7000 women tell it like it is', *BabyCenter,* available at http://www.babycenter.com/0_the-new-mom-body-survey-7-000-women-tell-it-like-it-is_3653252.bc?articleId=3653252&page=4#articlesection0, date accessed, 30/3/08.

[87] Jessica Brown, 'Celeb Post-Baby Weight Debate, *Americanbaby*, available at http://www.parents.com/family-life/celebrity-parents/health-beauty/baby-weight-hysteria/?page=8, date accessed, 20/6/08. Nancy O'Dell is coanchor of the popular American television show *Access Hollywood* that reports stories about celebrities.

of the fetus."[88] An enormous range of products are advertised on the BR Mum sites as essential items to be purchased before the birth.[89] The almost overwhelming number of items deemed necessary to purchase when having a baby mean that reproduction is now constructed as consumption.[90] For instance, *Maternitymall* advertises a "Prenatal Education System" which is an audio system designed to be strapped on to the pregnant abdomen and play sounds from the womb in a series of "lessons".[91] The advertisement states that the Prenatal System is "the first step in your child's cognitive development".[92]

A great deal of products bought "for the baby" before birth are gendered as male or female. Endowing the fetus with a gendered identity may be helpful to parents[93] keen to assign stereotypical gender characteristics to the "baby". It also assists manufacturers who are enabled to market two different streams of products – one for each gender. Parents who have both male and female children are under considerable social pressure to buy gender-specific items instead of "passing down" existing products. BR Mum sites exploit the culturally popular notion that fetuses, babies and children have gendered identities. On these sites, advertisements show baby clothes chiefly in either pink or blue while toddlers and older children wear stereotypically gendered clothes – "boys" are dressed in practical clothing in primary colours whereas "girls" wear dresses, decorated clothes, and pastel shades.[94] In advertisements for toys,

---

88 Janelle Taylor, 'Of Sonograms and Baby Prams: Prenatal Diagnosis, Pregnancy, and Consumption', *Feminist Studies*, 26, 2 Summer (2000); 391-418, p. 398.

89 These include nursery items (cradles, cots, bedding, manchester items, rocking chairs, furniture, curtains, and lamps), toys, nappies, nappy disposal systems, nappy bags, wipe warmers, rocker/bouncers, feeding equipment (bottles, bottle warmers, breatpumps, sterilizers, cups, plates, bowls, and cutlery), pacifiers, changetables, strollers, car seats, high chairs, potties, shopping cart cover, and clothes.

90 Taylor, 'Of sonograms and baby prams', p. 391.

91 *Maternitymall*, advertisement for the babyplus prenatal education system, available at http://www.destinationmaternity.com/Product.asp?Product_Id=3988D4601&category_Name=&Category_Id=4601&MasterCategory_Id=&website_Id=6, date accessed 2/6/08.

92 *Maternitymall*, advertisement for the babyplus prenatal education system, available at http://www.destinationmaternity.com/Product.asp?Product_Id=3988D4601&category_Name=&Category_Id=4601&MasterCategory_Id=&website_Id=6, date accessed 2/6/08.

93 Petchesky, 'Foetal images'.

94 See 'Outfits, Overalls and Dresses', *BabyCenter* Store, available at http://store.babycenter.com/category/on+sale/baby+clothing+on+sale/outfits%2C+overalls+-+dresses.do, date accessed 1/3/08 and *Maternitymall*, 'All our For Baby', available at http://www.destinationmaternity.com/mastercategory.asp?MasterCategory_Id=GM10&shop=all, date accessed 1/3/08.

"boys" are generally shown in active roles with bouncers or equipment that requires physical interaction.[95]

Just as motherbodies are held responsible for the consumption of food and products for "baby", narratives of safety and maternal responsibility are highlighted in advertisements for other goods and services associated with childrearing. *Maternitymall*'s guide to buying furniture and other equipment warns the buyer ("moms") to consider issues of baby and/or child safeness as it links to puchaseable goods.[96] *Maternitymall* viewer/users are told of the risks of immunization (minimal and able to be handled by 'your medical practitioner'), how to prevent a cold, reduce allergens in the home and the signs that indicate hearing loss, ear infection and conjunctivitis.[97] While *BabyCenter*, *Maternitymall* and *Americanbaby* offer important information about baby and child care, they surround the text with clusters of advertisements (often by the site's sponsor company)[98] directed at maternal bodies as those who are responsible for consumption to maintain family health and safety. Hence, the maternal body is constructed as a consumer of "necessary" products indicated by consumption clusters.[99]

In the same vein as their remediation of print magazines' focus on food, health, convenience and safety, the BR Mum websites also reinforce mainstream maternity publications' preoccupations with fashion. Contemporary fashion is designed to display slim, toned bodies that are promoted as "natural". Sociologist Mike Featherstone argues that "fitness and slimness (have) become associated not only with

---

[95] See 'Toys' *BabyCenter* Store, available at http://store.babycenter.com/category/toys.do. date accessed 1/7/08. See also Alisa Stoudt, 'Toy Fair Trends', *Americanbaby*, available at http://www.parents.com/fun/toys/toy-fair/2008-toy-fair-trends/?page=6, date accessed 1/7/08.

[96] 'All our For Baby', *Maternitymall*, available at http://www.destinationmaternity.com/mastercategory.asp?MasterCategory_Id=GM10&shop=all

[97] 'Baby's Health', Maternitymall.com, available at http://www.maternitymall.com/homeMInfo.asp?SelectCase=Article&CategoryId=1&PageLp=1&ArticleId=29&SubCategoryId=3, date accessed 27/2/08.

[98] *BabyCenter* runs an advertisement sponsored by Johnson and Johnson – linking to their products - that demonstrates "how to safely bath your precious bundle". The site also offers tips on how to reduce a child's fever in a promotion of Tylenol a children's pain reliever.

[99] Stevens and Maclaran, 'Exploring the "shopping imaginary", pp. 288.

energy, drive and vitality, but also with worthiness as a person".[100] Pregnant bodies are, therefore, under pressure to not only monitor and control their oral consumption, they are also strongly encouraged to show the efforts of all their work in regulating their bodies in fashionable clothes. The strictly maintained and stylishly attired pregnant body is then a corporeal example of "good" maternity.

Advertisements for maternity clothes on the BR Mum sites illustrate the current focus on slimness and well-toned bodies. All of the models on these sites are slim and toned "showing off" their compact little "bumps". They are positioned in standard fashion poses with the pregnant belly being the focus of the shot. In a move that echoes the erasure of maternal bodies in the medicalised diagrams of pregnant torsos, shots of *Maternitymall*'s models are often cropped so that their heads do not appear. Fashion for pregnant and other maternal bodies on these sites usually represents the stereotypical, modest, "stylish" and "feminine" mother. This use of conventional fashion marketing is evident in *Maternitymall*, as it promotes clothing labels Motherhood, Pea in a Pod, and Mimi Maternity. While *Americanbaby* also features maternity wear, the focus is on fashion within a budget.[101] *BabyCenter* and, *Maternitymall* mobilize narratives of nature exhorting the viewer/user to "shop eco-friendly products". The sites' promotion of green politics marks a shift in advertising practices whereby narratives of environmental concern are moved from the margins to the mainstream.[102]

As well as the facilitation of pleasurable shopping experiences, the BR Mum websites also contain a wealth of information concerning the practicalities of mothering. For example, the sites provide descriptions, safety ratings and user recommendations about equipment such as cots, strollers, highchairs, changetables or nappies which is useful to access when considering buying the products. Information

---

[100] Mike Featherstone. "The Body in Consumer Culture." in *The Body, Social Process and Cultural Theory,* edited by Mike Featherstone, Mike Hepworth and Brian S. Turner. (London: Sage Publications, 1993), 171-196, p. 183.

[101] Mothers are urged to maintain their pre-child(ren) interest in "style" and fashion while conserving their spending power. See 'Party Mix: Glam up for a night out', *Americanbaby.com*, available at http://www.parents.com/parents/category.jsp?categoryid=/templatedata/child/category/data/1138913257167.xml, date accessed 27/2/08.

[102] Tania Lewis. "Transforming Citizens? Green Politics and Ethical Consumption on Lifestyle Television." *Continuum*, 22:2, 227 – 240. Online Publication date, 1st April, 2008, available at http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10304310701864394, date accessed 2nd June, 2008.

about illnesses, settling techniques, and the feeding of babies and children are also helpful. The enormous networks of information immediately available to the reader/interactor combined with the links to enable the purchasing of equipment and/or services marks the BR Mum sites as convenient and useful in ways that print maternity magazines are not able to replicate.

Not just consumption but communities

The enjoyment of ease of consumption, however, does not result in the completely uncritical absorption of meanings and "product lust" espoused by some feminist interrogations of mainstream magazines.[103] Maclaran and Stevens' research demonstrates that readers of women's magazines are not completely swept up in the texts' aspirational or commercial discourses.[104] Instead, Maclaren and Stevens argue that readers use the texts as spaces for relaxation where they often focus on imaginary rather than literal consumption which enables a pleasurable "break" from everyday routine.[105]

I adapt this notion of Maclaran and Stevens to argue that commercial maternity websites in their anonymity and immediacy provide space for viewer/users not just to relax and escape from RL but to vent their feelings about discourses of maternity. I argue that this process of venting produces a maternal gaze that, in a double movement, both critiques and supports dominant narratives of consumption, femininity and motherhood.

The BR Mums' online discussions criticize imperatives to consume a particular brand of product or restrict the maternal body solely to the domestic sphere. For example, a *BabyCenter* bulletin board post satirized commercialized maternity by stating that "I am the best mommy because my DS (dear son) is in the 95%, I drive a Mercedes, and my stroller was $1500."[106] Responses to this post agree with the

---

[103] See Stevens and Maclaran, 'Exploring the "shoring imaginary', p. 287. See also Naomi Wolf's description of "product lust", The Beauty Myth, (London: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 70.

[104] Stevens and Maclaran, 'Exploring the "shopping imaginary", p. 287.

[105] Ibid, pp. 290-291.

[106] The "95%" refers to the way in which a baby's growth is measured by health authorities and categorised in percentiles according to length and weight. *BabyCenter*, 'Is this funny or offensive', posted by afmom12818, available at

sentiments and further discussion in this thread focus on ideas about the falsity of tying positive mothering outcomes to the buying of certain products.[107] But these critiques of specified consumption are literally surrounded by advertisements for Johnson & Johnson products and other "consumption constellations"[108] of a vast array of goods and services.

Another example of the twofold process of challenging and supporting meshings of consumption, femininity and maternity occurs on the *BabyCenter* forums where participants are highly critical of magazine obsessions with the bodies of celebrity mothers, especially post-baby weight loss. The criticism concerning magazines being out of touch with RL is summed up in the following posting from *4my2boys*:

> Seeing celebrity mums walking around dressed perfectly. It's a sham! They have the money to pay people to watch their kids, cook for them, pay personal trainers, do their hair and make-up....I wish there was a more real example of how life is after a baby. And then maybe we wouldn [sic] put so much pressure on ourselves to be perfect.[109]

Hypertexted alongside these critiques of glossy images of famous mothers, however, are Web pages devoted to postpartum weight loss and gossip about "celebrity moms" that reaffirm narratives of surveillance and control that circulate around maternal bodies.[110]

In a discussion of another issue regarding maternity in the *BabyCenter* forum titled 'Working Parents' *lovemycaj* wrote of her desire to stop paid work to stay at home with her children even though that would mean curtailing their consumption of "extras" like specialty food items and holidays.[111] This post received support

---

http://boards.babycenter.com/n/pfx/forum.aspx?tsn=1&nav=messages&webtag=bcus1435504&tid=382 date accessed 29/6/07, posted 28/6/07.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Stevens and Maclaran, 'Exploring the "shopping imaginary": p. 288.

[109] *4my2boys*, posted on *BabyCenter*, 19th March 2008, 'Are Mothers Too Focused on their weight?' available at http://boards.babycenter.com.au/n/pfx/forum.aspx?tsn=1&nav=messages&webtag=bcAUBurnques&tid=13, date accessed 20/3/08.

[110] This juxtaposition of criticism and embracing is especially evident on the *Americanbaby* site as it has its own section devoted to "celebrity moms". See 'Celebrity Bump Watch: See the Hot Hollywood Mamas-to-Be', *Americanbaby*, available at http://www.parents.com/family-life/, date accessed 30/3/08.

[111] *Lovemycaj*, *BabyCenter*, Forum: 'Working Parents', discussion thread titled 'Miserable at work – but what else can I do?', posted 31/3/2008, available at

endorsing sentiments of conventional maternity concerning the benefits of mothers staying at home with their children. Threads with similar responses are also evident on *Maternitymall* and *Americanbaby*.[112] In response to this post, *Mom to Fearless* talked of her feelings of failure as a woman and a mother which revolve around outsourcing domestic duties traditionally associated with maternity. She writes:

> My inability to accomplish even the most simple domestic task is killing me! I feel like such a crappy Mommy and wife ... I just suck at being a woman. I read about all these women who work & clean their houses, & cook and plant flowers and bake cupcakes for parties – I've never made an edible cupcake!![113]

The responses to the post focused on her being a "good person" and having skills other than in the domestic realm. While *Mom to Fearless* thanked others for their supportive posts, a further examination of notions of conventional maternity that enforce the myth of the Happy Housewife and her connections to motherhood was lacking.[114] The slippage between maternity and femininity also remained unexamined. Even though traditional representations of maternity are critiqued in BR Mum discussion threads, any thorough untying of connective strands between maternal bodies and conventional tropes of motherhood is not enacted. Similar examples to this

---

http://www.parents.com/dgroups/index.jsp?plckForumPage=ForumDiscussion&plckDiscussionId=Cat%3a34773c39-9fcf-4895-8f66-a967c40205faForum%3ae0d2dc2c-3ad6-4a06-8e9a-ffe318e010dbDiscussion%3ae13491ca-095d-4f3b-9cac-444bc5d665e7, date accessed 1/4/08.

[112] Discussion thread 'Taking time off with baby', posted 7/3/2008, *Maternitymall*, available at http://www.destinationmaternity.com/messageboards/destinationmessageboardshowthread.asp?ForumId=9&ThreadId=46, date accessed 8/3/2008. See also Discussion thread, 'What do you love and hate about your spouse?' posted 23/4/08, *Americanbaby*, available at http://www.parents.com/dgroups/index.jsp?plckForumPage=ForumDiscussion&plckDiscussionId=Cat%3a34773c39-9fcf-4895-8f66-a967c40205faForum%3a19205eb9-64d7-4e1a-98f2-c2e05d864f91Discussion%3a188ecbab-70cf-4960-903d-17a93639874c&plckCategoryCurrentPage=0, date accessed 24/4/08.

[113] 'Can I vent too?', Message posted by *Mom to Fearless*, 9/5/08, *BabyCenter*, Forum, 'Working Parents', available at http://www.parents.com/dgroups/index.jsp?plckForumPage=ForumDiscussion&plckDiscussionId=Cat%3a34773c39-9fcf-4895-8f66-a967c40205faForum%3ae0d2dc2c-3ad6-4a06-8e9a-ffe318e010dbDiscussion%3ae6a9eef2-d326-424b-b386-3fe2d2c5c326&plckCategoryCurrentPage=02, date accessed 10/5/08.

[114] Lesley Johnson, '"Revolutions are not made by downtrodden housewives" Feminism and the Housewife', *Australian Feminist Studies* 15, 32, July (2000): 237- 248, p. 244.

questioning and reinstating of traditional notions of maternity also occur in the forums of *Americanbaby* and *Maternitymall.*[115]

As these reports of discussions about consumption and normative modes of mothering indicate BR Mum websites are not just online markets. They are cyber experiences like meeting friends in a café or enjoying a shopping trip with friends. From these experiences the sites build communities which are hybrids.

While a significant proportion of BR Mums who post on the Bulletin Boards of *BabyCenter*, *Americanbaby* and *Maternitymall* are American, there are always participants from all over the globe. These virtual communities, however, are not spaces where difference is left behind with the "meat" as Rheingold argues in his idealized view of online connections. For instance, nationality is often signaled on the boards by language.[116] Difference at the level of nation is also inevitably illustrated by discussions of schooling systems, extracurricular activities, celebrities, television programs, magazines and current events specific to certain locations. From my examinations of the BR Mum sites, these topics are the most popular on the various boards and blogs. In the time period I investigated these sites, a number of viewer/users post regularly and online friendships form. There is, however, a regular turnover of participants as some BR Mums stop posting while new members join.

The virtual communities are constructed in *Americanbaby*, *BabyCenter* and *Maternitymall* through directly addressing a maternal "you", the pleasures of immediate and hypermediated communication and interactive participation. For instance, all the BR Mum sites promote maternal participation in forums, bulletin boards and/or blogs as well as viewer/user ratings of products for sale. The immediacy of this approach heightens the sense of community and friendship remediated from mainstream magazines and enhances the appeal of the sites' interactivity. Multiple

---

[115] Thread on *Americanbaby* 'Great Husband – Stupid Commetns' posted 22/5/08, available at http://www.parents.com/dgroups/index.jsp?plckForumPage=ForumDiscussion&plckDiscussionId=Cat%3a34773c39-9fcf-4895-8f66-a967c40205faForum%3a19205eb9-64d7-4e1a-98f2-c2e05d864f91Discussion%3a374a38c6-61e2-4401-96d1-08224fbde5c4&plckCategoryCurrentPage=0, date accessed 23/5/08 and also Post by Judy, 'Husband see's me as a mommy not a woman now', *Maternitymall*, 27/5/08, available at http://www.destinationmaternity.com/messageboards/destinationmessageboardshowthread.asp?ForumId=12&ThreadId=148, date accessed 28/5/08.

narratives of motherhood that emerge from the immediacy and hypermediated features of the sites open up the possibility of challenging conventional constructions of community and maternity. The importation of narratives of conventional motherhood from participant responses and maternity magazines, however, continues to produce a paradox that promotes and undercuts traditional representations of maternal bodies.

Community building on the BR Mum sites is based around the qualities that mark online communities – immediacy, interactivity, and commonality. Recent research into the Web based community argues that virtual communities form around common needs and similarities shared through "impersonal trust".[117] Online community building is enabled by processes of viewer/user identification, the exchange of support, and the development of "interpersonal trust".[118] Viewer/users of *BabyCenter*, *Americanbaby,* and *Maternitymall* share a common interest in issues relevant to pregnancy and motherhood. All the sites are personalized and response oriented. Bulletin Boards (BB), forums, polls and reviews of infant, children's and maternity products all require feedback from the virtual community. Discussions on the BBs involve topics related to contemporary motherhood - children's developmental stages and product recommendations. Alongside these standard topics, posts also explore issues such as unwarranted medical intervention, maternal alcoholism, mental illness, and unwanted pregnancy. These posts rely upon the responses of fellow community members which subverts the notion of "expert" intervention in personal problems.

The diversity of discussion matter and the refusal of "expert" authority, however, does not result in a range of responses or open up interrogations of traditional narratives of maternity. To the BR Mum with an unwanted pregnancy, posters recommend talking to a trusted friend, "battling through" or adoption.[119] Abortion was

---

[116] Even referring to the notion of mother reveals difference as American, Canadian and some Asian participants will use the word "mom" while English, European, Australian and New Zealand BR Mums generally write "mum" or "mummy".

[117] Hanna Kaisa Ellonen, Miia Kosonen and Kaisa Henttonen, 'The Development of a Sense of Virtual Community', *International Journal of Web Based Communities*, 3, 1 (2007): 114-130.

[118] Ibid.

[119] *Shaleem*, 'Introductions', 26/9/08, available at http://boards.babycenter.com.au/n/pfx/forum.aspx?nav=messages&msg=124.108&sr=y&webtag=bcAUbclub201004, date accessed 13/10/08.

not mentioned as an option.[120] While the subject matter of these posts stands outside traditional notions of maternity, the BR Mums urge conventional solutions to the issues, thus, clearly defining the communities as homogeneous and normative.

The potential for subversion of conventional narratives of maternity and the embracing of diverse communities is also blunted on the BR Mum websites by strong editorial control. For example, some images and posts on the *BabyCenter* BBs and forums are removed by the moderators.[121] While it is standard practice for moderators to remove material that they deem may be offensive to viewer/interactors, the removals on *BabyCenter* usually occur when a controversial topic such as maternal gun ownership or infant death is under discussion. Deletions on the *Americanbaby* forums occur as a result of "heated comments" and "offensive" language.[122] For instance, *Momsanimals* posted a message in which she was extremely frustrated with the bad behaviour of her children and seeking assistance.[123] The BR Mum was so angry with her daughter that she called her a "bitch". This post was removed. The moderator commented that *Momsanimals'* use of "bad" language was unacceptable on the *BabyCenter* BB.[124] Furthermore, the moderator stated that mothering is a difficult task and mothers need to shoulder this burden without resorting to "offensive"

---

[120] Ibid.

[121] For example images were removed on the BB, "Burning Question", under the topic 'Should every mom own a handgun?' available at http://boards.babycenter.com/n/pfx/forum.aspx?tsn=1&nav=messages&webtag=bcus1435504&tid=405, date accessed 1/07/08. Also, the deletion of posts was commented upon in the thread 'Let's get to know each other' that discussed infant death and co-sleeping arrangements. The discussion is dated 1/7/07, available at http://boards.babycenter.com/n/pfx/forum.aspx?tsn=10196&nav=messages&webtag=bcus1435504&tid=131, date accessed 1/7/08. Forum moderators have not commented on the deletions.

[122] *Americanbaby* forum postings were deleted as a result of "heated comments" and language perceived by the moderators to be offensive. For example, the poster, *momsanimals* was seeking advice for her children's behavioural problems and titled her message "Little B'yotch". Discussion around the deletion is posted on the forum, "Ask the moderators", available at http://www.parents.com/dgroups/index.jsp?plckForumPage=ForumDiscussion&plckDiscussionId=Cat%3a8ba94167-36b8-4151-9813-a6625c143553Forum%3a22263535-7fdc-41f9-8b4b-1e1c0e54f8d4Discussion%3a098730f9-b461-439a-8364-bae1fa17a2e6, date accessed 1/7/08.

[123] Discussion around the deletion is posted on the forum, "Ask the moderators", available at http://www.parents.com/dgroups/index.jsp?plckForumPage=ForumDiscussion&plckDiscussionId=Cat%3a8ba94167-36b8-4151-9813-a6625c143553Forum%3a22263535-7fdc-41f9-8b4b-1e1c0e54f8d4Discussion%3a098730f9-b461-439a-8364-bae1fa17a2e6, date accessed 1/7/08.

[124] Ibid.

language and strong expressions of anger.[125] Similarly, viewer/interactor opinions and feedback are requested by *Americanbaby* and *Maternitymall* but they are subjected to editorial intervention and generally limited to brief comments.[126] These limitations on topics, language, and expressions of difficulties places strict boundaries around the BR Mum communities as they reinstate a conventional maternal voice that speaks of motherhood only in happy, acquiescent and humorous terms.

As well as editorial control, humour is used to undercut more critical engagements with discourses of traditional maternity. Feminist critic Brenda Goldberg writes that the use of humour is popularly perceived to trivialize certain topics.[127] On the *Americanbaby* site Harlyn Aiszley's blog '*Are You My Mothers?*' describes her life as a lesbian mother in a humorous way where the politics of sexuality are abandoned.[128] Considerations of same sex family issues are reduced to how Aiszley and her partner can buy a family pass to the local swimming pool.[129] Here, humorous stories about consumption are privileged over critical discussions of the politics of maternal sexuality and different discourses of family.

Expressions of sexuality for BR Mums are definitely not laughing matters. For instance, responses to a viewer/interactor who asked if her love of masturbation was the reason she was unable to become pregnant were disapproving and angry.[130] One

---

[125] Ibid.

[126] Editorial intervention is also foregrounded in the way that the blogs are presented on this site. For example, the site states "We've rounded up the wittiest, smartest tell-it-like-it-is mom bloggers (and one intrepid daddy) to satisfy all your fly-on-the-wall curiosities about how other people parent their kids. Click on the links below to read what it's like to have a baby born at just 25 weeks (phew: there's a happy ending), live as a single mama in the city, or attempt to lose the baby weight. Bookmark your favourites and check back often to see how their stories unfold." Blogs, *Americanbaby*, available at http://www.parents.com/parents/category.jsp?categoryid=/templatedata/parents/category/data/1177006606652.xml, date accessed 09/09/07.

[127] Gill Aitken, Pam Alldred, Robin Allwood, Tom Billington, Erica Burman, Brenda Goldberg, (eds), *Psychology Discourse Practice: From Regulation to Resistance*, (London: Taylor and Francis, Ltd, 1996), p. 154.

[128] Harlyn Aizley, 'Are You My Mothers?' *Parents.com*, available at http://community.parents.com/dgroups/persona.jsp?plckPersonalPage=PersonaBlog&plckUserId=b299f3b565ea91323795bdaf06d989ab&userId=b299f3b565e, date accessed 09/09/07.

[129] Ibid..

[130] 'I need a Baby', Get Answers, *BabyCenter,* Available at http://www.babycenter.com/400_i-need-a-baby_975398_164860145767.bc, date accessed 09/09/07.

BR Mum responded with the comment "And if you're joking around its not funny."[131] This maintains traditional narratives of maternity which endorse a compliant heterosexuality enclosed within marriage and the family.[132] The maternal bodies who refuse to embrace this conventional containment of maternal sexuality are made aware of the policing of boundaries in the BR Mum sites.

Although limits and borders are clearly maintained, considerable space is devoted to tools, information and services that facilitate community engagement on BR Mum sites. Consolidation of community strengthens the already effective marketing of brands relevant to maternity and attracts a growing audience increasingly loyal to sites perceived to deliver appropriate services and facilities. Internet researcher and commentator Greg Sterling suggests that client/mother recommendations in online communities are vitally important as a positive review can generate powerful publicity which translates into commercial success while the opposite is also true.[133] Sterling cites the influence of Linda Perry, an American who founded maternity website Peachhead as an example of this maternal economy:

> This combination of factors has made her (Perry) disproportionately powerful in the small community of businesses that serve affluent mothers on the fashionable West Side of Los Angeles. A rave or a thumbs down from her can make or break, say, a children's hair salon or even a pediatric practice. This clout has made her the don to a kind of mommy mafia in the hyperattentive child-rearing circles.[134]

Of course this phenomena is true for mothers who inhabit a specific and privileged demographic of affluent maternity with full access to online maternity sites. This maternal economy, however, mirrors various RL grassroots circles of exchange of information and recommendations that often fuels a diversity of mothers groups. It is predictable and ironic that the most successful sign of community on the BR Mum websites is their consumer power.

---

[131] Ibid.

[132] Patrice Di Quinzio, *The Impossibility of Motherhood*, (New York, London: Routledge, 1999), pp. xiii-xiv. See also Alison Bartlett, *Breastwork Rethinking Breastfeeding*, (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2005), pp. 66-68.

[133] Greg Sterling, 'Rise of the "Mom Networks" Blog, *WordPress.com*, available at http://gesterling.wordpress.com/2006/10/19/rise-of-the-mom-networks/, date accessed 07/09/07.

[134] Ibid.

Rather than fulfilling Rheingold's fantasy of utopian communities, the BR Mum sites illustrate David Bell's definition of contemporary community as a space where connections of place and familial bonds are disconnected and rejoined along lines of cyber-communication.[135] The BR Mum sites offer space for subversions of conventional notions of maternity and community but this is undercut by expressions of traditional discourses of maternal bodies, strong editorial control and the use of humour. Possibilities of shifting beyond traditional concepts of maternity and community are both upheld and refused in the range of topics and conventional responses that reveal the limits of Rheingold's notion of utopian online communites.

BR Mum sites are saturated in commerce, biotouristic desire and conventional tropes of maternity. The biotouristic desire to penetrate the flesh to observe the inner workings of the pregnant body is enabled by the immediacy of the sites and delivered in the jocular tone of mainstream magazines. Hypertexted with biotourism dreamworlds display a plethora of goods and services associated with mothers, babies and children. *BabyCenter, Americanbaby* and *Maternitymall* are successful examples of the branding of maternal bodies and the cultivation of community for information-giving as well as profit in cyber(cultural)space. However, the possibilities inherent in the sites' capabilities for shifting notions of maternity and community from the conventional to that of specific lived experience are not realized. The sites' potential for hypertexting different maternal voices and engaging with inclusive communities is stopped by the importation of narratives of traditional tropes of motherhood, techno-medicalization, biotourism, trivializing humour and commodity-driven maternity.

Having explored some traces of the BR Mum commercial web sites I will now turn to an online magazine that moves towards an alternative cybermaternity, the *Bad Mothers Club.*

---

[135] Bell, *Cybercultures*, pp. 92-110.

The Bad Mothers' Club

In a demonstration of contemporary connections between various technologies, I first read about The *Bad Mothers' Club* (*BMC*) and its members, the Bad Mothers, in an article in *The Age* newspaper in 2003.[136] *BMC* (Figure 8, p 121)[137] is a British website, edited and published by Stephanie Calman, set up in response to the increasing volume of information about pregnancy and child rearing from a variety of domains that seeks to regulate and control maternal bodies. Calman writes that the online publication of *BMC* was "a reaction to the avalanche of advice and criticism a woman is subjected to when she becomes pregnant. She switches from being viewed as an intelligent, humorous, thinking person into a fool and a pod".[138] As a journalist Calman had experience of the print medium but little knowledge of the Internet. In order to create an online magazine, Calman employed the website construction company, Spyder Redspy.[139] *BMC*'s self-description as an e-magazine (online version of print magazine) effectively distances the e-publication from e-zines (cyber versions of zines) such as *Hip Mama* which I discuss in the next section and aligns it more with mainstream print and electronic magazines. *BMC* is a remediation of glossy upmarket British magazines such as *Hello!* with a twist of self-deprecating humour that is sharply critical of conventional narratives of maternity. The e-magazine takes hold of conventional inscriptions of maternal bodies as patient, nurturing and completely fulfilled by the bearing and care of children and uses these writings to playfully construct critical rebuttals of traditional representations of motherhood for the empowered maternal gaze.

Although the BR Mum, *BMC* and *Hip Mama* websites all focus on issues pertinent to motherhood, each e-text constructs a different maternal body. The BR Mum sites' construction of maternity is firmly enmeshed in the consumption of narratives of techno-medicalisation, information gain, utopian community and traditional tropes of motherhood as well as commodities. *BMC*, however, wields wit, satire and self-

---

[136] 'My life as a slob mother', *The Age*, *theage.com.au*, April 9, 2003. available at http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/04/09/1049567738355.html.

[137] Figure 8: Bad Mothers Club Mainpage, sourced from http://www.badmothersclub.co.uk/jsp/index.jsp, date accessed 21/10/09.

[138] Ibid.

[139] Spyder Redspy Ltd, Client Comments, available at http://www.redspy.co.uk/jsp5/index.jsp?lnk=400#bmc, date accessed 12/09/07.

conscious observation in order to puncture the fantasies of perfected, commercialized and celebritized motherhood and community. Representations of maternal bodies on the BR Mum sites are depictions of the Yummy Mummy – glowing, healthy, well-groomed, part-time worker, domestic goddess and attentive wife.[140] A Bad Mother from the *BMC* is an out and proud Slummy Mummy[141] who refuses to buy into the myths promulgated by conventional images of maternity. Cyber-reworkings of discourses of glossy maternity magazines are earnest and straightforward on BR Mum sites whereas these narratives are humorously examined as constructions by the *BMC*. As a researcher and forum participant I have regularly been involved with the *BMC* from 1999 in the previously outlined time periods. It is the site's dark and insightful humour, its sense of community and its class politics that have most caught my attention and these features are the focus of my discussion here. Bad Slummy Mummies

As of September 2009 *BMC* is divided into seventeen sections linked from the mainpage. There are the usual sections displayed in the website's header – *Features* (articles by Bad Mothers, Figure 9, p 122)[142] *Contact Us, Helplines, Why BMC?* (the site's mission statement) and *How It Works* (detailing how to register for the site). The other section linked from the header is *Retell Therapy*, a moderated forum where participants begin threads of conversations by posting comments to the website. Even though there may be gaps of hours or days between postings these messages reflect on and interact with previous comments and, thus, form online conversations.

Seven links are centred in the middle of the mainpage of BMC's current incarnation (September 2009). First, *Win Grandparents* links to a competition in aid of charity to win a copy of a book about grandparents. Then, *You Think You're It, Don't*

---

[140] A Yummy Mummy is "a young sexually attractive mother". *Urban Dictionary*, available at http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=yummy%20mummy, date accessed 5/6/08.

[141] A Slummy Mummy is the name given to mothers who do not live up to the ideal of the Yummy Mummy. It is generally more of an English and European trend. Unlike the Yummy Mummy, the Slummy Mummy is dishevelled, disorganised, concentrates on family rather than work outside the home yet she is not idealized an Domestic Goddess. See *The Happy Housewife* available at http://ahappyhousewife.blogspot.com/2006/06/scrummy-slummy-mummy.html, date accessed 2/4/08.

[142] Figure 9: Features, *BMC*, sourced from http://www.badmothersclub.co.uk/jsp/index.jsp?lnk=100 date accessed 21/10/09.

Page 121-122 have been removed for copyright or proprietary reasons.

Figure 8: Bad Mothers Club Mainpage, sourced from http://www.badmothersclub.eo.uk/jsp/index.jsp , date accessed 21/10/09.

Figure 9: Features, BMC, sourced from http://www.badmothersclub.co.uk/jsp/index.jsp?lnk=100 date accessed 21/10/09.

You? – instigated in 2009 - click-links to photographs of animals with funny captions. *Forward Slash* is a new section only begun in June 2009 in which Stephanie Calman considers topics that range from the British Government initiatives to vet adult volunteers at children's events, the swine flu pandemic and recycling schemes. Calman's articles are also accessed from a link, *Happy Families* which is the same title as her *Daily Telegraph* column. In these writings Calman presents herself as the Bad Mother par excellence as her witty and insightful writings meditate upon how contemporary motherhood is constructed and represented as conventional in various media.

Our Favourite Things links to a segment headed *Recommended*, in which *BMC* participants post in details of products and services that they enjoy or think might be useful to mothers. These span diverse areas like books, films, DVDs, holidays, places to eat out, clothes, music, make-up, children's products and sex toys. *Need a Laugh* is a section set aside for jokes sent in by viewer/interactors. The participant responses are usually irreverent and ribald. *Tantrum of the Week* enables Bad Mothers to produce or "vent" impassioned writings about problems or issues they find difficult. These threads range from everyday middle-class concerns - not being able to find a holiday location to suit the family – to issues deeply embedded in the fabric of various cultures - feelings of inadequacy and depression regarding a general lack of value associated with the position of mother.

At the bottom of the mainpage three major sections are linked in four panels. Two of these panels link to the global company Amazon.com in order to sell books by Stephanie Calman and her husband Peter Grimsdale. An image of an older woman carrying a bag emblazoned with "I am an old bag" links to the *BMC* merchandise department which sells t-shirts, mugs and Christmas cards with the *BMC* logo. *Blah/Bollocks of the Week* provides space for Bad Mothers to engage in online "rants" on topics that include British government initiatives on childhood obesity and child rearing philosophies. The last panel in the bottom row links to *The Bad Housekeeping Institute* which is a collection of "hints, tips and shortcuts" concerning domestic tasks.[143] In the manner of mainstream magazines, these items suggest "time saving"

---

[143] 'The Bad Housekeeping Institute – Hints, Tips and Shortcuts', available at http://www.badmothersclub.co.uk/jsp/index.jsp?lnk=110&category=The%20Bad%20Hous

recipes and advice for a variety of household problems such as how to remove stickers from furniture and how to clean mirrors.

Since 2004 *BMC* has undergone some major changes. Before 2004, *Features'* articles, sometimes written by viewer/interactors but usually by Jane Purcell, Nickki Brown, Linda Fox and Madeline Price, were always an integral and continually updated part of *BMC*. While the uploading of feature articles has remained static for the last two years the other sections of *BMC* that rely upon input from viewer/interactors are frequently updated. Post 2004 *BMC* is, to a greater extent, driven by its readership as demonstrated in the flourishing forums of *Retell Therapy*. Threads are continually updated and new topics for discussion are constantly being introduced and commented upon. The shift from a website that is chiefly authored by one or a few people to one that is driven by its readership is significant. Calman's lessening commitment to *BMC* and the increasing Bad Mother forum involvement in the website assists in the development of a strong online community. This growing emphasis on forum participation could also represent a move to make *BMC* more appealing to its readership, attempting to tap into prevalent contemporary desires for immediacy, information and community. The appeal of a strong and vibrant online community of like-minded individuals where feelings of belonging and attachment may be enjoyed – it is, after all, a "club" - attracts paying customers to the *BMC* who need to pay registration fees to post messages. "Clubs" maintain strong boundaries and borders between those who "belong" and those outside the limits while often charging joining fees.

While the BR Mum and *Hip Mama* sites are free to view, from January, 2008, the *BMC* charges a subscription fee of £12 per year to post messages on the e-magazine's forums. This compares favourably to subscriptions for both print and online publications. [144] In a similar vein to *BMC* the Australian parenting website, *Real Mums*

---

ekeeping%20Institute&subcat=Hints,%20Tips%20and%20Shortcuts, date accessed 11/11/08.

[144] For instance, a full yearly subscription to the highly regarded British newspaper *The Times* is £312.

The Times, Times Online, available at http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/tools_and_services/subscriptions/e-paper/, date accessed 6/2/09. An annual subscription to *The Times'* e-paper is £89.99. *The Times, Times Online*, available at http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/tools_and_services/subscriptions/article4438217.ece, date accessed 6/2/09.

offers free reading of blogs and articles but charges a fee of $45 (Aus) to participate in forums.[145]

Humour

The BR Mum, *BMC* and *Hip Mama* sites are fuelled by three different missions. In contrast to the commercialism of the BR Mums' sites *BMC* relies upon a humorous approach to the topic of maternity. It is possible to enjoy reading the *BMC* solely as an extremely funny text. The fact that *BMC* also, on one level, identifies, outlines and renders humorous the gendered inconsistencies inherent in narratives of contemporary motherhood ensures that the website is potentially a potent source of subversion of dominant discourses of maternity. In one thread of interpretation, I argue that *BMC*'s funny critiques of traditional motherhood draw on a feminist sensibility that underlines the gendered politics of mothering practices in the West and refuses tired old tropes of maternity. In this section I explore the ways in which the *BMC*'s humorous stories and posts examine and reject conventional representations of motherhood. To consider *BMC* as a text where comic writing enables the delineation and critique of social, cultural and political norms I turn to feminist theorists American academic Nancy A. Walker and German linguist Helga Kotthoff.[146]

The *BMC* is not, however, a feminist networked utopia completely free from the limitations imposed by traditional tropes of motherhood. I argue that *BMC* functions as a text of sometimes contradictory humorous discourses linked together in

---

Similarly the critically acclaimed and popular newspaper *The Australian Financial Review* charges $1308 (AUS) per year for a full print subscription and $368 (AUS) for the digital version. *Financial Review*, afr.com, available at http://www.afr.com/home/, date accessed 6/2/09

[145] *Real Mums*, subscriber information available at http://www.realmums.com.au/index.php?categoryid=22&p2_articleid=35, date accessed 6/2/09.

[146] Nancy A. Walker, *A Very Serious Thing – Women's Humour and American Culture*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988) and Helga Kotthoff, 'Gender and Humour: The State of the Art;, *Journal of Pragmatics*, 38 (2006), pp. 4-25, 2006. See also Audrey Bilger, *Laughing Feminism: Subversive Comedy in Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen*, (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1998); Regina Barreca (ed), *Last Laughs: Perspectives on Women and Comedy*, Studies in Gender and Culture, Volume 2, (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1988); and, Barbara Levy, *Ladies Laughing: Wit as Control in Contemporary Women Writers*, (New York: Routledge, 1997).

hypertextual moments.[147] In this section I also investigate these hypertexted threads. I examine the ways in which *BMC* mobilizes humour to gleefully subvert traditional narratives of motherhood. Hypertexted amongst these strands I discuss the website as a remediation of glossy maternity magazines in which conventional tropes of maternal bodies are imported from RL texts like those maternity publications.

The writings back to conventional maternity performed by the *BMC* are saturated with humour derived from the unruliness of the Bad Mothers. 'Humour' itself is difficult to define as there is always a strongly subjective element to its interpretation. What I find funny may not even raise a smile from another. Humour is also dependent on common understandings of specific codes, cultures and boundaries. Feminist academic Joanne R Gilbert argues that humour is "a cultural barometer, revelatory and liberating" that "refers to material designed and performed to elicit laughter from an audience".[148] Theorist Danielle Russell identifies within stand-up comedy "a tradition of ridiculing moral, social, and political conventions."[149] Academics Janet Holmes and Meredith Marra define humour as "a multi-functional and flexible discourse strategy which pervades everyday talk."[150] Given the slipperiness of the term "humour", its resistance to definition and the dearth of academic discussion on this topic, I describe humour as text in a particular context that is coded and/or perceived as amusing and/or funny. I argue that humour is dependent upon a combination of authorial intent and audience reception. The effect of the text is reliant on the coding or form as well as context and observer perception. Coding of the humorous text informs and guides audience responses which also depend upon historical context. For instance, contemporary audiences could find material written fifty years ago that was designed to be amusing to be offensive – perhaps racist and/or sexist - rather than humorous. Conversely, some texts that were once coded as serious material might be viewed by

---

[147] David Bell, *Cybercultures,* p. 2. A hypertext(ual) moment is one that simultaneously holds different, often contradictory, narratives together at the same time. Thus, the *BMC*'s promotions and subversions of dominant discourses of maternity are only a click link away from each other.

[148] Joanne R. Gilbert, *Performing Marginality: Humour, Gender and Cultural Critique,* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2004), p. xvii and p. 8.

[149] Danielle Russell, 'Self-Deprecatory Humour and the Female Comic: Self- Destruction or Comedic Construction?', *Thirdspace*, 2, 1, November (2002), available at http://thirdspace.ca/articles/druss.htm, date accessed 7/9/08.

[150] Janet Holmes and Meredith Marra. "Humour as Discursive Boundary Marker in Social Interaction." In *Us and Others*, edited by Anna Duszak, , (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002), pp. 377-400, p. 377.

current audiences as unintendedly humorous. For example, a book written in the 1800s concerning ladies etiquette and a 1950s sex education film are bóth coded as educational at the time of their production. Contemporary audiences, however, applying different cultural and historical codes of behaviour and appearance may find a wealth of humorous material in the two texts, laughing at difference – attitudes, language and fashions. Texts coded and/or received as humorous, then, render absurd behaviours, practices and beliefs. Humour reveals and, sometimes, revels in other possibilities of doing and/or being. In this section I use the terms 'humour' and 'comedy' interchangeably.

Unruly Women

In order to investigate the ways in which the Bad Mothers' use of humour paradoxically subverts and embraces traditional narratives of maternity I draw upon the notion of the unruly woman who stands beyond boundaries of the normative.[151] As in the position of the stand-up comic, those who create and perform humorous material are enabled to, briefly, step outside conventional behaviours and norms in order to produce humorous moments.[152] This temporary permission to reject the restrictions of dominant discourse is important for women as it permits the telling and examination of their own narratives, often ignored or trivialized by mainstream culture, without alienating a potentially diverse audience. Historically, women's humorous transgressions of convention take the form of the unruly woman.[153] This transgressive woman embodies Bahktin's notion of carnival in her humorous exchanges which challenge traditional conceptions of femininity.[154] The unruly

---

[151] Angela Stukator, 'It's Not Over Until the Fat Lady Sings: Comedy, the Carnivalesque, and the Body Politics' in *Bodies Out of Bounds: Fatness and Transgression*, edited by Jana Evans Braziel and Kathleen LeBesco, (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2001), pp. 197-212.

[152] Russell, 'Self-Deprecatory Humour and the Female Comic'..

[153] Gill Aitken, Pam Alldred, Robin Allwood, Tom Billington, Erica Burman and Brenda Goldberg, eds, *Psychology Discourse Practice: From Regulation to Resistance*, (London: Taylor and Francis, Ltd, 1996), pp. 161-163.

[154] Ibid. Also Bakhtin's concept of carnival refers to the period before Lent being traditionally a time of excess, inversion, creative expression and carnal satisfaction. The "authoritarian word" is opposed and the "unvarnished truth" revealed. There is always a comic component of the carnival as fools and clowns mocked serious rituals or narratives. For Bakhtin the carnival is ruled by the "grotesque body" – the flesh that revels in sensual pleasure and which is usually controlled by the mind. See Michael Holoquist, Prologue and Introduction,

woman is a figure of ambiguity and excess. Her fleshiness/defiant attitude/sexuality exceeds conventional representations of gender and renders her monstrous.

Even though the unruly woman expresses a defiance of social and cultural norms, paradoxically, she also supports traditional concepts and classifications. Academic Angela Stukator argues that the unruly woman "is a product of the bourgeois imagination and the politics of patriarchal relations. Within a network of interrelating and dependent hierarchies, unruliness gains its meaning from that which it is not: ordered, rule-bound, and restrained, attributes associated with normative masculinity and femininity".[155] The challenges to convention of the unruly women, therefore, both subvert and uphold norms as they are built upon paradox.[156]

I argue that the humour-saturated writings of the Bad Mothers on the *BMC* site overcome what Helga Kotthoff terms the double marginalization of women engaging in humorous speech. *BMC* also extends into cyber(cultural)space feminist writer, Nancy A. Walker's notion of women's humour as a means of overcoming conventional representations of females as passive and subordinate to dominant male culture.[157] Kotthoff contends that women have historically been perceived as peripheral to the production and performance of comedy which, in itself is traditionally viewed as a lesser or "low brow" form of expression.[158] She writes that "In the past, women were often the objects but only rarely the subjects of jokes, especially not in public".[159] Kotthoff also argues that the work of female stand-up comedians and humorous writers has been mostly ignored by academic research and writings, the mass media as well as humour anthologies and exhibitions.[160]

Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Translated by Helene Iswolsky, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 5-10.

[155] Angela Stukator, 'It's Not Over Until the Fat Lady Sings', p. 199.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Kotthoff, 'Gender and Humour'. Walker, *A Very Serious Thing.*

[158] Ibid..

[159] Ibid.

[160] Ibid. The continuing relevance of this point is echoed in a number of contemporary articles. For example, American columnist Christopher Hitchens' *Vanity Fair* article 'Why Women Aren't Funny' upholds a conventional notion of humour production and use. Hitchens argues that humour is basically a tool for attracting a mate and so men are the ones who are capable of being funny whereas women have no need of this ability as they are intrinsically attractive to males. See Christopher Hitchens, 'Why Women Aren't Funny', *Vanity Fair*, January 2007, available at

Women continue to be marginalised in the area of comic expression yet female writers and performers who rely on humorous narratives in their work possess the potential to overturn conventional notions of gender and humour.[161] Nancy Walker writes "Passivity and wit are diametrically opposed; the former requires acquiescence to rules and standards imposed by the dominant society while the latter, with its associative values of intelligence, perception and irreverence implies the 'tilting ... of unofficial values over official ones'".[162] The observant and unruly humour of the *BMC* claims space and speech for maternal bodies that have been subsumed in male dominated hierarchies of culture, politics and society.

Bad vs Good - Unruly Bad Mothers

BMC's humorous reclamation of maternal voice and witty play with conventional notions of maternity are aptly summed up in the site's title, tagline and accompanying graphic. This "club" that invites mothers to join self-consciously describes its membership as *bad* mothers who define themselves in opposition to the traditional Good Mother. The title, *Bad Mothers' Club*, encapsulates the Bad Mothers' humorous reworking and refusal of the impossibly exacting standards of contemporary maternity as espoused by print and online maternity texts. This rejection of traditional tropes of maternity through humour radiates from the title to the accompanying graphic. In contrast to the smiling or serene mothers and babies that illustrate the BR Mum pages, the image placed alongside the *BMC* title is that of a martini glass. Tilted on an angle, the glass is filled with clear fluid and perched on the rim is a child's pacifier, taking the place of a cocktail garnish. A purple handle on the pacifier is reflected in the purple print that proclaims, "Bad Mothers Club". Post 2006 the heading "Incorporating Bad Dads" is added. As at June 2005, the *BMC* slogan under this heading states "In the aisle by the chill cabinets, no-one can hear you scream". This line enacts a playful reworking of the advertising tagline from a 1970s horror film,

---

http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2007/01/hitchens200701, date accessed 5/7/08. This heteronormative contention, however, does not take into account the numbers of women throughout the world who are engaged in writing and performing comedy. See Walker, *A Very Serious Thing*; Crawford, 'Gender and Humour in Social Context'; Kotthoff, 'Gender and Humour' and, Michael Gadd, 'Female Comedians Still Face Problems of the Past', *The Age*, *theage.com*, April 6, 2007, available at http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2007/04/06/1175366468720.html, date accessed 9/9/08

[161] See Walker, Crawford; Kotthoff, and,Gadd.

[162] Walker, *A Very Serious Thing*, p. 26.

Alien –"In space no one can hear you scream".[163] The *BMC*'s refashioning of the original line draws on a well-known moment of popular culture to humorously align maternity and domesticity with monstrosity and horror. The Bad Mothers of *BMC* are monstrous but also hilarious.

The *BMC*'s blend of humour and critique of conventional maternal bodies in current media extends from title, tagline and graphics to the site's advertisements. For example, an advertisement on the home page for a *BMC* carry bag emblazoned with the slogan "I am an old bag" features a somewhat dishevelled, 'plus-sized', mature age model. This unruly woman, representing the Bad Mothers, stares defiantly out at the viewer. The graphic depicts the excess and ageing flesh of a woman who is both aware of her status as a Bad Mother and enjoys the humour of this situation.

BMC's two main threads of humour and critique of images of conventional maternity are foregrounded in the sites's mission statement. The website is promoted online in this statement as "a web magazine for mothers who need a laugh, some solidarity with fellow strugglers" and "a truly unique concept".[164] In an introductory section titled *Why Bad Mothers Club?* the *BMC* editors write:

> Bad Mothers Club seeks to provide a genuine alternative to the content of mainstream websites and women's magazines, much of which contributes to women's fear that they are somehow inadequate, as mothers and as people. BMC is designed to be a place where people can express their true feelings about parenting, families, relationships and Life in general.[165]

Thus, *BMC* describes itself in terms of writing that assists women to escape from pressures to conform to rigid societal norms. *BMC* provides space for mothers to humorously puncture norms of western maternity and re-frame their experiences. The text differs from print maternity magazines in that the emphasis is placed on witty recountings of maternal life. This writing is in the vein of "quality" society magazines

---

[163] *Alien* (1979) a horror/science fiction/thriller in which a spaceship (nicknamed "Mother") on a mission into outer space is invaded by aliens who incubate inside and burst out of human bodies. *Alien, Britannia Film Archives*, available at http://www.britannia.org/film/filmdetails.php?FilmID=00000149, date accessed 2/4/08.

[164] Why Bad Mothers Club? Available at http://www.badmothersclub.co.uk/jsp/index.jsp?lnk=001 Date accessed Wednesday, 3 August 2005.

[165] Ibid..

such as *The New Yorker*.[166] While the online mainstream maternity magazines I investigate employ an earnest and lightly humorous tone the *BMC* is self-consciously a repository for funny tales of mothers who are unable or do not want to meet the stringent codes of behaviour and practice set out by dominant discourses of western maternity. Throughout the site Stephanie Calman and the other Bad Mothers tell tales of how they refuse the role of the Good Mother of contemporary motherhood by presenting the family with easy fast-food instead of gourmet nutritionally sound meals; throwing out extremely dirty clothes rather than washing them; and, telling "the facts of life" in such a way that the children are frightened and disgusted rather than relieved at receiving accurate information concerning sexual reproduction.[167] Calman revels in her position as Bad Mother extraordinaire and constantly mobilizes humour to comment upon contemporary versions of the Good Mother. For instance, in one of her *Happy Families*' articles Calman writes: "Term is due to start again: phew. Worn out through the holidays by running alongside the children while they rollerblade – their new craze, Peter and I were by the second week begging them to watch more TV."[168] Thus, Calman writes back to the plethora of articles in mainstream print and online magazines that prescribe numerous extracurricular activities and domestic duties to be undertaken by the contemporary Good Mother. Watching television is not one of these activities.

While the predominantly cheerful tone of the BR Mum websites maintains notions of the Good Mother it is replaced on the *BMC* with one of sarcastic dark humour that enables the Bad Mothers to assume positions of power critiquing traditional discourses of maternity. For instance, the posts on the *BMC* forums usually forego the upbeat tone and positive subject matter of the BR Mums that underline a normative maternity in messages such as "crap week coming up, why are my kids such a nightmare".[169]

---

[166] Published since 1925, *The New Yorker* is an American magazine that has a loyal national and international audience. The magazine is well-known for its reporting of New York's cultural life as well as its inclusion of fiction, poetry, essays, satire, cartoons, and reporting on political and social issues. *The New Yorker* is famous for its thoroughness of fact-checking, copyediting and high standard of political reporting. *The New Yorker*, 'About Us', available at http://www.newyorker.com/magazine, date accessed 15/8/08.

[167] *BMC, Retell Therapy*, available at http://www.badmothersclub.co.uk/jsp/index.jsp?lnk=300, date accessed 12/10/07.

[168] Stephanie Calman, 'Bushcraft Boys', *Happy Families*, available at http://www.badmothersclub.co.uk/jsp/index.jsp?lnk=102&featureid=396, date accessed 2/2/09.

[169] *strongcoffee*, posted *BMC* 12/09/07.

Other posts in this thread sympathised with the mother complaining about her children.[170] The stereotype of blissful heterosexual marriage is deflated in posts where Bad Mothers express disillusionment with their partners. A funny example of this puncturing occurred in the post with the title *stupid chefboy is limping around all pathetic and wanting sympathy.*[171] Another Bad Mother responded to this message by stating "tell him he'll find SYMPATHY in the dictionary ... between shit and syphilis!!"[172] This cuttingly humorous thread stands in sharp contrast to the cheerfully sympathetic messages of the contributors to the BR Mums' forums.

In the writings of the Bad Mothers, however, the Good Mother and her attachment to conventional maternity haunt the text. To further examine these threads of Bad haunted by Good maternity I turn again to the notion of the unruly woman.[173] I argue that the Bad Mothers are unruly mothers who paradoxically refuse and embrace traditional tropes of maternity.[174] For instance, instead of images of slender, well-groomed, happy mothers and immaculate cheerful children on the BR Mums pages, the accompanying graphic for Stephanie Calman's regular feature, as at September 2007, is a photograph of the editor looking frazzled while her infant son screams in her arms. Currently the same image is situated next to the link to *Happy Families* on the *Features* page. While only the upper part of Calman's body is visible, it is obvious that she is the opposite of the slim, smiling blonde BR mum dealing capably with docile infants/children. Calman's fleshiness, wind-blown dark hair and awkward position as she grapples with a screaming baby attempting to wriggle out of her grasp embodies the unruly mother. The juxtaposition of this image at the head of a column that laughs at but also acknowledges personal and societal yearnings to fulfil the stereotype of conventionally attractive maternal bodies places Calman in a position of paradox – subversive unruly mother defined and contained by traditional tropes of maternity.[175]

---

[170] *minx,* posted, *BMC*, 11/9/07.

[171] *Ladyhortensehamiliton* posted, *BMC*, 12/09/07.

[172] *nuckin futs*, posted *BMC*, 11/09/07.

[173] Stukator, 'It's Not Over Until the Fat Lady Sings', pp. 197-212.

[174] Ibid.

[175] While Calman writes strong critiques of normative maternity and gender stereotypes in her regular column she also embraces dominant narratives of maternal bodies in her expressed

Many other examples of the humorous exploits of unruly mothers surface in Stephanie Calman's writings for *BMC*. Apart from the forums, her persona dominates the *BMC*. Her work sums up the ambivalence and excess of the unruly mother. She regularly writes articles that set the subversive tone of the website and gives editorial authority to the rejection of traditional images of maternity. Calman's pieces focus on her own family life and the ways in which she refuses to shape some of her views and experiences according to normative expectations of western middle class maternity frequently alluded to in mainstream magazines. As these writings are shaped for an audience the boundaries between fiction and lived experience are blurred. Calman's articles are chatty and funny writings back to the evacuation of maternal subjectivity in favour of maternal obedience and containment within strict culturally determined limits of a bourgeois maternity. Her written longings to eat less and have a slimmer body, better behaved children and more domestically organised home life also indicate a desire, however fleeting, for involvement in a more conventional maternity than she espouses as a Bad Mother.[176] These ambivalent shiftings produce a paradox in which the unruly mother is able to both challenge and support conventional notions of maternity.

An example of this paradox of the unruly mother sustained and driven by the dark humour of the Bad Mothers is apparent in a number of Calman's articles that discuss parenting philosophies and give advice regarding child rearing. Advice-giving, usually by an "expert" which tends to favour conventional takes on parenting philosophies is a staple of both print and online maternity magazines. The Bad unruly Mothers, especially Calman, however, perform a double movement in which they both refuse

---

longings for a more conventionally attractive appearance, well-behaved children, and greater abilities in the area of domestic tasks.

[176] See the following articles by Calman in *Happy Families*: 'Hi, we're Cleo and Gemini', available at http://www.badmothersclub.co.uk/jsp/index.jsp?lnk=110&category=Happy%20Families, date accessed 14/3/09; 'Turning into my mother' available at http://www.badmothersclub.co.uk/jsp/index.jsp?lnk=102&featureid=446, date accessed 14/3/09; 'Life Cycle', available at http://www.badmothersclub.co.uk/jsp/index.jsp?lnk=102&featureid=480, date accessed 14/3/09; 'The World Bickering Record', available at http://www.badmothersclub.co.uk/jsp/index.jsp?lnk=102&featureid=484 , date accessed 12/3/09; 'You'll Never Walk Alone', available at http://www.badmothersclub.co.uk/jsp/index.jsp?lnk=102&featureid=486, date accessed 14/3/09; and, 'My Birthday', available at http://www.badmothersclub.co.uk/jsp/index.jsp?lnk=102&featureid=479, date accessed, 14/3/09.

and support traditional images of maternity. For instance in the article, 'Why Stephanie Calman does not do Ballet' the author refuses the role of unpaid maternal chauffeur ferrying her children to lessons involving the usual middle class concerns of ballet, sport, music and a "foreign" language. Her identification and rejection of maternal enmeshment in the currently well-established bourgeois ritual of children's after school educational activities enacts a double movement that both rejects and reinstates the conventional role of "taxi mum". In the first part of the movement, Calman humorously re-writes the authoritative advice-giving and earnest embracing of conventional parenting philosophies abundantly espoused in BR Mum websites. In contrast to the BR Mum parenting philosophy that negates maternal longings and promotes the notion of the always-available mother constantly driving children to their extracurricular activities, Calman's article locates mother-desire in the pleasure derived by parent/child interaction that escapes from cultural expectations of "organised" time. She writes that

> ...if you fill up their (children) time with Activities, they'll never learn to think. Never mind relax ... its when we do nothing much *together* that our relationship with our children is at its sweetest ...

This refusal of commodified mother/child time is also a writing back to the extreme commercialism of the BR Mums sites where this kind of commodification is perceived as a maternal virtue.

While Calman's article concerning extracurricular activities humorously promotes a parenting philosophy that is a rejection of conventional maternity, some of her other writings and the messages from other Bad Mothers on *Retell Therapy* forums completes the second part of a double movement that supports traditional narratives of motherhood. Despite her rejection of contemporary maternal norms and parenting philosophies concerning overscheduling children, Calman has mentioned in other articles the after-school schedule of her family. This includes her children being involved in netball, rugby, numerous open days, canoeing, violin, guitar and percussion lessons as well as attending a sewing group. [177] The *BMC* forums also contain many examples of mothers who wearily transport their children to a full

---

[177] See articles written by Calman in *Happy Families*, 'Permission Slips', 'We got rhythm', and 'Art for Christ's Sake'all available at http://www.badmothersclub.co.uk/jsp/index.jsp, date accessed 19/3/09.

schedule of after-school activities.[178] Alongside Calman's article, however, well-known author on parenting issues, Michael Grose exhorts parents to allow children to develop habits of (self)reflection and relaxation that are valuable aspects of the maintenance of mental health. Thus, *BMC* still gestures towards the authority of expert opinion that all too often drives mainstream magazines and BR Mum sites rather than maternal knowledge and desire.

Although the BR Mums websites generally either ignore or contain challenges to traditional notions of maternity within lightly humorous anecdotes, the *BMC* celebrates the recasting of conventionally maternal bodies as autonomous, intelligent women who struggle to fulfil their own desires. The undeniably funny website actively sets out to lampoon the earnest imbrication of traditional maternity and commerce that casts BR Mums as Good Mothers and reduces all those outside their sphere to the position of Bad Mother. In a project of reclamation, *BMC* presents maternal bodies as awash in a(n) (alcoholic) cocktail of desire, anger, pleasure, commerce, popular culture, technology and maternity narratives. It is precisely the image espoused by BR Mums of maternal bodies as perpetually vigilant child producers, carers, wives, consumers and products themselves that provides a target for the black humour of the Bad Mothers. While the BR Mum sites generally employ a chattily earnest tone that reworks the tenor of print maternity magazines, the *BMC* is steeped in witty irony that creates narratives of playful invective. When humour surfaces on BR Mum websites it is contained within bounds of "good taste" where topics such as sexuality, politics, education and paid work are mentioned but not fully explored.

Throughout *BMC* humorous juxtapositions of conventional maternity and contemporary text undercut traditional constructions of maternal bodies and the commercialization of mainstream maternity websites. For instance, in the *BMC* of 2005 a graphic link to the merchandising shop is that of a traditional depiction of the Madonna with Jesus as a young child. Under the heading *Buy Things*, the Madonna's thought bubble exclaims "I wonder if it's too early to go back to work". The juxtaposition of one of the most traditional representations of a maternal body and

---

[178] *Retell Therapy*, available at http://www.badmothersclub.co.uk/jsp/index.jsp?lnk=300, accessed throughout research period and quoted from in this section until January 2008.

humorous text points towards the gaps between the popularised ideal and the current practices of western motherhood.

Where the Bad Mothers Roam There's No Homesteading

The unruliness of the Bad Mothers, linked together by the darkly humorous puncturing and reinstatement of conventional narratives of maternity and parenting philosophies, finds (many) voice(s) in the sites's numerous forums that form a robust and ribald online community. Unlike the earnestly serious BR Mums, the Bad Mothers inhabit and participate in forums that are steeped in the black humour that could be described as particularly British (like *Fawlty Towers* or *The Office*).[179] *BMC*'s provision of space for mothers' writings and satirically humorous tone encourages the formation of an empowered maternal gaze and a sense of community. The greater opportunities for reader/interactor participation in *BMC*'s forums that have developed over time mark a more general cultural shift in cyber(cultural)space concerning popular perceptions of online maternity magazines as potential community- forming spaces rather than sources of information to be accessed and digested. In accomplishing this empowerment and critique, however, the website replaces notions of conventional maternity with narratives of the Bad Mother as the norm implying that the *BMC* promotes a Rheingoldian type of coherent , global and utopian community. Rheingold's famous description of online communities refers to them as "a bit like a neighbourhood pub or coffee shop" in which "everyone knows your name".[180]

Howard Rheingold's notions of virtual community form the cornerstone of a great deal of writings concerning the personal and social advantages inherent in online communities.[181] His definition of online communities, however, delineates them in terms of inevitability and nostalgia.[182] I draw on the work of cultural studies theorists

---

[179] See *Fawltysite.Net*, available at http://www.fawltysite.net/, date accessed 2/7/08 and 'The Office', *The Internet Movie Database*, available at http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0290978/, date accessed 2/7/08.

[180] Howard Rheingold, *Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1993), p. 422.

[181] Bell, *Cybercultures*, pp. 97-100.

[182] For critiques of Rheingold's notion of virtual community see for example, Barry Wellman and Milena Gulia, 'Virtual communities as communities: net surfers don't ride alone', in *Communities in Cyberspace* edited by Marc A. Smith and Peter Kollock, (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 167-194. See also Kevin Robins, 'Cyberspace and the World We

David Bell and Kevin Robins to argue that Rheingold's notion of virtual community is a nostalgic longing for a distant and imagined past in which communities formed cosy enclaves.[183] Bell and Robins contend that any observations of online communities must be contextualized in terms of RL as participants inevitably import cultural and political issues into the virtual community.[184] According to Bell and Robins, Rheingold's delineation of online community as a pub or small country town where everybody knows everyone else (and what they're doing) refuses the potential of difference.[185]

The *BMC* reveals the limitations of Rheingoldian notions of online community as global, inclusive, and able to fulfill the social needs of all participants. For instance, the *BMC* is grounded in a particular sensibility firmly tied to place and nation. Specifically, the maternity in question is undeniably British. *BMC* demonstrates its cultural and spatial location in the language used, focus on British culture and links from online to RL communities. Bad Mothers generally pepper their messages with British slang expressions. They are "chuffed" when pleased, call each other "lovey" and talk about their "ickle" children and preface insults with "bleedin" in the forum. Discussions on the *BMC* forums centre on specifically British culture and society especially in online chats concerning Britain's education system as well as locally available products and services associated with infants and childrearing. As well as a focus on localized issues and goods, *BMC* shifts beyond the Rheingoldian notion of the utopian virtual community to return online Bad Mothers to the Real World. For instance, Bad Mothers have a section in *Retell Therapy* dedicated to the arrangement of face to face meetings grouped together according to geography.

A Class Act

Just as the Bad Mothers are defined by a specific British culture and sensibility, the *BMC* community is also circumscribed by a quintessential middle class politics. The maternal body constructed by *BMC* is middle to upper class and stands in contradiction to the stated aims of the website as critiquing traditional representations

---

Live in' In *The Cybercultures Reader*, edited by David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy, (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 77-95.

[183] Bell, *Cybercultures*, pp. 101-110. Robins, 'Cyberspace and the world we live in'.

[184] Ibid.

[185] Ibid. Bell, pp. 105-106. Robins, p. 87.

of maternity in general. Ostensibly *BMC* constructs maternal bodies as outside the confines of conventional motherhood but the site implicitly codes mother-bodies as well-organised, capable, well groomed when attending official functions, able to hold dinner parties at short notice and find good help to enable the family to successfully achieve an annual holiday which often involves skiing.[186] Stephanie Calman writes of the private school her children attend, her family's travel in Europe, French Cinema, auditioning for the Royal Shakespeare Company and her artistic inclinations.[187]

Although the Bad Mothers satirize representations of conventional maternity, their humorous critique is directed at the norms of middle class mothering. Dominant representations of working class mothering remain intact. And even though the unruliness of the *BMC* community ridicules traditional tropes of maternity, the Bad Mothers also display their enjoyment of the privileges of their class and wealth in the discussion of the activities they enjoy or dislike and the values they hold. While they protest against the limitations of the BR Mums and Yummy Mummies, the Bad Mothers sound, at times, suspiciously like their more commercialised counterparts having a bad day rather than mothers who are genuinely outside the consumer world of the BR Mums.

Retold Therapy

BMC Bad Mothers, then, are unruly women who enjoy humorously dissecting conventional images of maternity while also quietly hankering after some of those elements of traditional motherhood. In hypertextual moments, *BMC* enacts overturnings of conventional discourses of maternal bodies while also undercutting these subversions by returning to narratives of normative maternity. *BMC* opens up (cyber)space in which maternal voices are heard and cleverly uses humour to puncture

---

[186] Numerous posts throughout the forums of *Retell Therapy* in the time frame I researched the website, available at http://www.badmothersclub.co.uk/jsp/index.jsp?lnk=300.

[187] See Calman's articles, *Happy Families*, "Last Roll of the Penny', available at http://www.badmothersclub.co.uk/jsp/index.jsp?lnk=102&featureid=440; 'Phone Skills', available at http://www.badmothersclub.co.uk/jsp/index.jsp?lnk=102&featureid=487, date accessed 3/4/09; 'The Chrysalis' available at 'Breathless', available at http://www.badmothersclub.co.uk/jsp/index.jsp?lnk=102&featureid=489, date accessed 3/4/09; 'The Lost Trainers of Heligan', available at http://www.badmothersclub.co.uk/jsp/index.jsp?lnk=102&featureid=485, date accessed 3/4/09; and, 'The Nightmare', available at http://www.badmothersclub.co.uk/jsp/index.jsp?lnk=102&featureid=483, date accessed 3/4/09.

dominant discourses of motherhood. As unruly women these mothers celebrate the ways in which they exceed the western model of ideal maternity – they are fleshy, enjoy drinking alcohol as well as laughing with their female friends. The Bad Mothers are slothful, disasters in the kitchen, do not sew costumes and delight in poking fun at the whole institution of maternity.

Unruly women, however, inhabit a world of paradox and the Bad Mothers are not exceptions to this rule. Implicit in the writings of the website are narratives in which Bad Mothers' secret yearnings surface for the trappings of a conventional middle class maternity – domestic, coupled, heterosexual, white, middle class, self-sacrificing with well behaved and talented children, as well as a successful part-time career. While I have outlined their challenges to western norms of middle class motherhood, the Bad Mothers' reliance upon humour to the exclusion of more critical engagements with issues and their occupation of specific subject positions ensures the maintenance of a tight-knit online community and limits the range of their critique. I argue that from its particular location – British, white, middle class, able-bodied, and heterosexual - the *BMC* forms an online maternity community that, in a hypertextual moment, refuses and upholds conventional discourses of bourgeois motherhood. As a specifically located maternity e-text it does not support the notion espoused by cyber-theorist Howard Rheingold that online communities are inclusive utopias. Instead, I contend that the *BMC* and the Bad Mothers form an e-community that reflects David Bell's notion of online communities as partial and constantly needing to negotiate difference.

The inclusion of a subscription fee in order to post messages to the various forums ensures that the *BMC* maternity e-community moves beyond other free to view motherhood websites to a position that is, oddly enough, more entrenched in the e-commerce of the Internet than the commercial sites on this topic. So, while the BR Mums look out smilingly from their advertisement-laden websites upholding a contemporary and commercialised version of the 1950's housewife, the Bad Mothers' funny stories and unruly behaviour paradoxically subvert while reinstating traditional narratives of maternity. In order to investigate an online maternity text that presents a greater array of hypertextual possibilities for cybermaternity I turn to Ariel Gore's e-zine, *Hip Mama.*

Hip Mama: Better than a Double Prozac Latté

From the commercialization and convention of the BR Mums and the double movement of the *BMC*'s humorous questioning and reinforcement of tradition, I now shift to an online maternity community engaging with narratives of maternal bodies that often roam outside the confines of normative motherhood. *Hip Mama* (Figures 10 and 11, pp 141-142)[188] is a website for mothers who are interested in critical discussions and activism concerning a variety of political, artistic and childrearing issues.[189] The Hip Mamas attempt to form an online maternity community that is an alternative to the plethora of a-political and commercial motherhood sites that infest the Internet. I contend that *Hip Mama* extends Andrea O'Reilly's notion of Mother Outlaw into cyber(cultural)space.[190] The term Mother Outlaw refers to O'Reilly's reinvigoration of the conversation formally begun by Adrienne Rich in 1976 concerning the definition of motherhood as institution and lived experience. O'Reilly argues that in order to embrace a feminist maternity of empowerment maternal bodies need to reject the institution of motherhood and its stereotype of the Good Mother and turn to her opposite, the Mother Outlaw. This maternal outlaw figure refuses the culturally entrenched imperatives for mothers to be perpetually available and completely centred on domesticity and children.

In this section my investigation of the *Hip Mama* site examines the ways in which the narratives of hip maternity intersect with and diverge from the consumption-driven maternal of the BR Mums and the Bad Mothers' humorous critique and tacit embracing of conventional discourses of maternity. As well as exploring intersections of Hip Mamadom and O'Reilly's Mother Outlaw I also interrogate the limits and boundaries of the *Hip Mama* community. To do this I draw upon the theories of

---

[188] Figure 10: Hip Mama and Figure 11, Hip Mama scrolled, sourced from http://www.hipmama.com/, date accessed 21/10/09.

[189] *Hip Mama*, available at http://www.hipmama.com/.

[190] See the following edited by Andrea O'Reilly, *Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering*, ((Toronto: Women's Press, 2004); *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born*, ((Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004); and, *Feminist Mothering*, (Albany, N.Y.; Bristol: SUNY Press, 2008).

Page 141-142 have been removed for copyright or proprietary reasons.

Figure 10: Hip Mama and Figure 11, Hip Mama scrolled, sourced from http://www.hipmama.com/ , date accessed 21/10/09.

Howard Rheingold and David Bell.[191] Finally, I discuss the ways in which narratives of race define the cyber-body of the Hip Mama and reveal the limits of the online community.

As at May 2009, the *Hip Mama* mainpage displays the hypermediated features that distinguish e-zines and digital texts from their print counterparts. On the right side information is cited about the negotiation of the website. *About Us* and *Welcome* sections define the site as an alternative maternity community founded by Ariel Gore and currently published by Bee Lavender. A self described "welfare mother" Gore drew upon her experiences as a teenage single mother in order to write and edit first the zine, and then the book, *The Hip Mama's Survival Guide*.[192] Throughout *Hip Mama*'s incubation and early construction, Ariel Gore continued her studies, stating that motherhood increased rather than lessened her professional goals. Bee Lavender's biography – linked to *Hip Mama* – lists her considerable achievements gained despite the debilitating effects of illness and personal hardship.[193] As a result of the popularity of their print and online publications both Gore and Lavender are highly sought-after speakers on childraising concerns in academic and mainstream forums.[194]

The website, launched in 1997, is the cyber-version of the print zine of the same name. *Hip Mama*'s mission statement proclaims it to be "a feminist, pro-choice,

---

[191] Howard Rheingold, *Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1993). David Bell, *An Introduction to Cybercultures*, (London, New York: Routledge, 2001).

[192] *Hip Mama*, available at http://www.hipmama.com/index.php, date accessed 14/3/08.

[193] Bee Lavender's Web page, available at http://www.foment.net/index.html, date accessed 14/10/02. Also, Lavender's hard copy publications include her co-editing with Gore of *Breeder: Real Life Stories from the New Generation of Mothers,* (Toronto, Ontario: Seal Press, 2001); *Mamaphonic: Balancing Motherhood and Other Creative Acts,* with Maia Rossini, (Brooklyn: Soft Skull Press, 2004): *Lessons in Taxidermy,* (Chicago and New York: Punk Planet Books and Akashic Books, 2005) and a print zine series *A Beautiful Final Tribute.* Lavender survived childhood cancer and the serious complications of a rare genetic disorder. She became a mother while she was a married teenaged working-class activist. By the time her daughter had turned four years old Lavender had completed a masters degree majoring in public administration. As well as mothering and studying, the thirty-eight year old mother of two children has worked as a civil rights advocate and policy analyst as well as writing hard copy publications.

[194] For examples of these engagements see Bee Lavender, *News*, available at http://www.foment.net/news.html, date accessed 29/5/09 and Ariel Gore Lit Star' *Red Room Writer Profile*, available at http://www.redroom.com/author/ariel-gore/bio, date accessed 27/5/09.

reader-written zine for progressive families".[195] Advertisements for books, online University courses and a not-for-profit law company are listed under the title graphic. The *Hip Mama* Shop links from the mainpage and advertises t-shirts and books written by Gore and Lavender. There is a request for reader/viewers to financially support *Hip Mama* by paid subscriptions – the implication being that this is a donation – or by advertising on the website. However, the details concerning this request are unclear as further information is unavailable and the website itself is free to view. Reader/interactors must register to post messages but this facility is free and open to everyone. Reader/interactors' blogs and their recent posts form two subsections listed under the heading *Navigation*. Below these facilities user log in details (anyone can join) are situated. Then mentioned are "Sister Sites" – *Bee Lavender, Ariel Gore, Yo Mama, Mamaphonic* and *Girl-Mom*.

The latest incarnation of *Hip Mama* – May 2009 - also lists new links to Twitter and Facebook as well as the old connection to the print zine of the same name. Lists of recent blog posts and Hip Mama users and guests completes the strip of information on the right side of the page. Between the two columns, the most recent blogs are located. Above the actual blogs the usual list of headings – *Home, Blogs Feature Archive, Recipes, Forums* and *Search* – stretch across the page. The *Feature Archive* includes posts by Hip Mamas that are accessed according to date and title. The posts archived date from 2003 onwards. The *Forums* heading links to a site that is used as an organizational tool to assist Hip Mamas to meet in RL. *Hip Mama* also has a search facility that enables the location of posts by using keywords.

While the headings are similar to those on the BR Mum pages and the *BMC*, the Outlaw Hip Mamas describe their own take on maternity in the content linked to the headings. Instead of the recipes advocating ease and timesaving on the BR Mum sites or the wine and gourmet food beloved by the Bad Mothers, the Hip Mamas advocate organic and alternative dishes like Crispy Kale Chips, Raw vegan Italian nut cheese, and Green Baby Food. The *Hip Mama Features Archive* rejects the anxiety and sentimentality of the BR Mums as well as the cynical humour of the Bad Mothers to reveal narratives that speak of race, rebellion, mental illness, politics, refusal of techno-medical discourses of maternity and sexuality. These strands of story are

---

[195] Ariel Gore, *Hip Mama*, available at http://www.hipmama.com/index.php, date accessed 14/3/08

suggested in the titles of the posts submitted by *Hip Mama* readers which include 'Black Invisibility and Racism in Punk Rock', 'Diary of a Revolutionary Milkmaid', and 'I Was a Teenage Transsexual Super Mom'.[196] While current publisher Bee Lavender regularly posts articles they are included alongside all the other writings from contributors. The site does not rely upon regular posts from commissioned writers. Instead, *Hip Mama* depends upon personal blogs and contributions from reader/interactors.

From 1999 until the present I have irregularly been a regular participant in the *Hip Mama* community as previously detailed. In the time periods already outlined I continued my documented observations and analysis of the site. I also took part in discussions concerning infant care, breastfeeding and the difficulties of combining childrearing and academic work. This participation occurred chiefly from 1999- 2005. From 2005 my contributions to debate on the site were sporadic, a few times a year, and limited to one or two comments per discussion. Most of these threads that contain my contributions are unavailable as the *Hip Mama* archive contains material only from 2004-2009.

In contrast to the earnest tone of the BR Mum sites and the darkly humorous *BMC*, *Hip Mama* writes a strongly political maternity and alternative online community. The term, "Hip Mama", itself, is playfully described on the site as a maternal body that both acknowledges and moves beyond traditional representations of motherhood.[197] In a humorous version of a dictionary entry, the description and rationale for the e-zine mobilizes humour, some sentiment and linguistic accuracy in the construction of a political lived reality of maternity.

> HIP. *Adj. Slang* Aware; Informed. 2 *n.* The part of the human body projecting below the waist on either side ... 3.*n.* A place where young children sit when tired of walking ... 5. Whatever you want it to be.
>
> MAMA 1.*n.* Mother, informal. 2.*n.* One who has a maternal relationship to, nurtures, puts up with, teaches, encourages, constructively yells at, sends money orders to, heats from a can or makes chicken soup for, is available for long talks with, and generally makes it her (his) business to take care of

---

[196] *Hip Mama*, available at http://www.hipmama.com/, date accessed 17/4/09.

[197] Ariel Gore and Bee Lavender, *Hip Mama, About Us*, available at http://www.hipmama.com/node/115, date accessed 1/8/05.

> the next generation. 3. *n.* A quality or condition that gives rise to another.[198]

According to this definition, a mama is nurturing but also "aware, informed". This description moves beyond the sentimental notion of motherhood as self-sacrificing nurturance as it possesses overtones of an awareness of political issues and other concerns of contemporary maternity.

In the *About Us* section *Hip Mama* is described as "a magazine bursting with political commentary and ribald tales from the front lines of motherhood. ... Hip Mama maintains the editorial vision that qualified it for the title "conservative America's worst nightmare."[199] Throughout the website Hip Mamas are generally written as feminist, vegetarian, tattooed, pierced, and as political activists. This provides a contrast to the well-groomed, product-hungry, irrevocably cheerful BR Mum and the cocktail-clutching Bad Mother who pokes fun at some of the objects, grounded in dominant discourse, she still desires and/or takes for granted.

Hip Mama Outlaws

In order to write, edit and produce *Hip Mama*'s alternative maternity Gore and Lavender draw on their past experiences as impoverished single mothers. Through their association with *Hip Mama*, however, both Gore and Lavender have morphed from "welfare moms" to celebrity personalities and poster girls for alternative motherhood grounded in a feminist sensibility. Together Gore and Lavender are depicted in alternative and mainstream media as the hippest of the feminist, tattooed, vintage-clad, activist hip mamas. Despite their career success, fame and presumably comparative affluence, to me their commitment to the writing of a political, creative, sexual and raced maternity as well as their tattoos and preference for clothes and music outside the mainstream position them as Mother Outlaws.

The term Mother Outlaw, popularized by Canadian feminist academic Andrea O'Reilly, is an elastic term referring to notions of empowered mothering that stretches to encompass a number of possibilities. O'Reilly takes up Adrienne Rich's division of

---

[198] Bee Lavender, *About Us*, *Hip Mama*, 20/10/03, available at http://www.hipmama.com/node/115, date accessed 15/8/09.

[199] Lavender, *About Us*, *Hip Mama*, available at http://www.hipmama.com/node/115, date accessed 1/8/05.

motherhood into institution controlled by patriarchal narratives and mother-centred discourse of maternal empowerment.[200] Rich posits that if mothers reject patriarchal maternity and it's central tenet of "powerless responsibility" – the (self)erasure of maternal voice, desire and body - they become "conspirators, outlaws from the institution of motherhood".[201] O'Reilly embraces Rich's arguments and contends that maternity is "not naturally, necessarily or inevitably oppressive", it is the institution of motherhood that controls and limits maternal bodies. [202] Both O'Reilly and Rich argue that when the state of motherhood is removed from the restrictive status of patriarchal institution it is able to become a location of empowerment and social change for maternal bodies.[203] For O'Reilly, empowered maternity "recognizes that both mothers and children benefit when the mother lives her life and practices mothering from a position of agency, authority, authenticity, and autonomy".[204] Thus, empowered mothering transgresses norms of western motherhood. It foregrounds maternal voices and desires while rejecting the white middle class ideal of intensive mothering with its strict child-centredness and negation of mother-self.

Empowered mothering, as posited by Rich and O'Reilly, fuels a feisty outlaw maternity that focuses on mother-centred narratives of agency and revels in breaking the masculinist laws of the father. Mother Outlaws move beyond mainstream discourses of maternity to explore the possibilities of mothering narratives being based on maternal lived experience and context. I argue that the *Hip Mama* website celebrates a movement of Mother Outlaws into cyber(cultural)space and encourages a cyber-empowered maternity to emerge from its writings and community.

First, *Hip Mama* does not target the fantasy of the Good Mother that mainstream maternity magazines address. The e-zine is written and produced by a number of politically aware feminists. Second, in opposition to conventional media publications *Hip Mama* disrupts the traditional binaries of author/reader, producer/consumer, and appropriate/deviant maternal as contributors write their own narratives that do not find space within conventional representations of maternity. There are regular postings

---

[200] O'Reilly, *Mother Outlaw*.

[201] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, (London: Virago, 1977), pp. 194-195.

[202] O'Reilly, *Mother Outlaws*, p. 2.

[203] Ibid, p. 2.

encouraging Hip Mamas to write articles and share their opinions on topics that others have raised. The e-zine is almost entirely constructed by and through interconnections and flows of sometimes contradictory ideas, beliefs, stories, and strategies written by Hip Mamas.

On the Web page, Hip Mamas mobilize the DIY philosophies of zines in combination with a fiery alternative maternity to produce an e-zine and linked sites that embrace a lived politics of maternal bodies. This Outlaw maternity is evident not only on *Hip Mama*'s main website but also throughout the e-zine's three sister sites – *Yo Mama Says, Mamaphonic* and *Girl-Mom* all founded by Bee Lavender. The first of the sister sites, *Yo Mama Says* embraces the Mother Outlaw in terms of politics. The site writes spiritedly against traditional tropes of apolitical maternity. Issues raised on this website include anti-war protests, campaigns to prevent the closure of women's health services and "nurse-ins" – groups of breastfeeding mothers organised in response to negative reactions to breastfeeding in public. *Mamaphonic*, encourages expressions of Mother Outlaws in terms of creativity. The site performs a writing back to conventional representations of maternity that limit maternal creativity to the domestic sphere. *Girl-Mom* evokes the Mother Outlaw that writes back to conventional notions of maternity as beyond the teenage years and the normative construction of teen parenting as inadequate and impoverished.[205]

Yo Mama, Mamaphonic and *Girl-Mom* link to and from the blog-based *Hip Mama*. Together, these websites create an actively interactive community of alternative maternity. The notion of community on the *Hip Mama* website is bolstered by the emphasis on "personal" blogs and interaction as opposed to the more impersonal feature articles which predominate in mainstream print and online magazines. The focus on blog-based communication facilitates a sense of immediacy and connectivity which, in turn, encourages the ability to interact and, thereby, strengthens community. Commenting on the advantages of blogging for community formation *Hip Mama* states "The blog format is primarily a monologue or place to

---

[204] Ibid,, p.12.

[205] Lavender writes that "Teenage pregnancy is not a "crisis" or epidemic, like so many people would have us believe. The only true epidemic associated with teen pregnancy is the overwhelming and universal lack of support available to young mothers. The only true crisis is the denial of the fact that teenage girls can be, are, and always have been, both

write about your own thoughts, but can also be a good way to build up a community of like-minded friends."[206] It is in attempting the construction of an online alternative maternity community that *Hip Mama* and its participants demonstrate the ways in which a virtual group is able to go beyond dominant discourses of motherhood and community. They also show how durable these conventional narratives are in cyber-communities.

Community

Hip Mama is a globally-available website that attracts postings from participants all over the world. It also organizes gatherings of participants in every continent on the earth.[207] Ariel Gore is a well-known "parenting expert" and internationally published author. The participants in the *Hip Mama* community are not so tied to their physical location that they prefer it to cyber(cultural)space when choosing which communities they want to join. Despite this immersion in flows of globalization, *Hip Mama* however, is also marked as a site that is grounded in a specific culture. Just as the majority of Bad Mothers are British, a significant proportion of the Hip Mamas live in or are citizens of the United States. This is obvious in the topics they engage with and the language used. For instance, much discussion on the blogs centres around American politics and culture. American terms such as "kick-ass", "hard-rockin" and "diaper" are often used. In the *Hip Mama* blogs, the disembedding that permits the subject to choose an online community is also circumscribed by maternal bodies being catergorised and defined according to various combinations of class, race, education, sexuality, beliefs, behaviour and appearance which will be discussed later in this section.

While the disembeddedness of the *Hip Mama* community is modified by its distinctive North American orientation and the defining of group members according to various subject positions, the site's subversions of traditional tropes of maternity releases feisty narratives of outlaw mothering in cyber(cultural)space. This lawless

---

sexual and maternal beings, with the capacity to love, procreate, and nurture." Bee Lavender, *Girl Mom*, available at http://www.girlmom.com/, date accessed 17/4/09.

[206] Posted by Bee at 1/8/2005.

[207] In the forums section of *Hip Mama* lists of geographical regions of the world enable participants to click on the link to go to a page that gives details of Hip Mama gatherings in different global areas.

contradiction of conventional maternity discourse is demonstrated in the topics of discussion threads that express an alternative motherhood. Maternity written as diversity rather than traditional limitation is evidenced in the variety and type of topics covered in the feature articles, blogs and postings of the *Hip Mama* site. The subversive mothering subjects discussed on the *Hip Mama* site stand in sharp contrast to the popular threads of debate in the commercial and more mainstream maternity websites. In the BR Mums' sites conventional maternity narratives are reflected in the forum titles Bargain Hunters, Cooking for Your Family and Moms at Home.[208] The Bad Mothers' darkly humorous take on maternity surfaces in discussion thread titles like Miserable old Goths, Where's my mate Joan Crawford? and F*** S*** B*******.[209] In contrast, *Hip Mama* blogs and discussions suggest a politically-charged alternative motherhood in the inclusion of the following topics - biracial children, bankrupt alcoholic mothers, parenting without positive parental role models, domestic violence, Downs Syndrome children, the reporting of incidents involving breastfeeding mothers, and non-mainstream child rearing philosophies.[210] In response to requests for advice, blogs offer assistance grounded in lived experience regarding topics such as retaining custody, extracting child support from reluctant sources, and instituting restraining orders on abusive ex-partners.[211]

Other discussion threads that demonstrate the Hip Mamas' outlaw status in the rejection of conventional maternity discourse focus on maternal sexuality. Posts mention Hip Mamas' partnered and non-partnered, same sex and heterosexual relationships. In her blog, Ariel Gore publicly documents her own same sex relationship. Posts are often supportive of same sex relationships - one blogger's online name is queermama - and heteronormativity is frequently critiqued. The Hip Mamas even play with the commodity-driven maternity of the BR Mums pointing out the absurdity of their heteronormative and commercial motherhood. One Hip Mama, *Macaronimaniac* posted a link on Ariel Gore's site to her own from which she sells a variety of clothes for adults, children and babies all emblazoned with the slogan "My

---

[208] *BabyCenter*, available at http://www.babycenter.com/community, date accessed 7/12/07.

[209] *BMC*, available at http://www.badmothersclub.co.uk/jsp/index.jsp?lnk=300, date accessed 7/12/07.

[210] Lavender, *Hip Mama*, available at http://www.hipmama.com/featurearchive, date accessed 21/1/08.

[211] Ibid.

other mother is also a lesbian."[212] This construction of an outlaw maternity allows a detraditionalization of the conventional maternal bodies constructed in mainstream maternity site as even the shopping dreamworld of the Hip Mamas expresses moments of cultural critique and humour.

Despite *Hip Mama*'s rejection of the BR Mum's deep embedding in narratives of commercialized maternity, the advertisements and calls for subscriptions on the site demonstrate that even alternative maternity e-zines do not operate outside the financial considerations that ensure the viability of an Internet publication. The tensions between the reality of financing a website and *Hip Mama*'s anti-commercial stance fuels a shopping dreamworld of paradox. In contrast to the hyper-commercialism of the BR Mums and the gourmet consumption of *BMC*, *Hip Mama* writes directly about the need for financial support to allow the site to continue. *Hip Mama* acknowledges the inevitable imbrication of commerce and e-text on the Internet and directly appeals to the participant to "Get rid of the ads! Subscribe to the site!"

The Hip Mamas enjoy a shopping dreamworld that is much less glossy than the BR Mums or the Bad Mothers but which is also dependent on commercial consumption. Advertisements are relegated to one column on the left side of the *Hip Mama* site as well as the Hip Mama Shop hypertexted from the home page. These advertisements regularly change as sponsorship deals are made, renewed or ended. In May 2009, *Hip Mama* advertises books from a self-publishing company, educational institutions and Earth-Justice, a" non-profit public interest law firm".[213] The Hip Mama shop sells merchandise directly related to the site – books written by the Hip Mamas and t-shirts advertising these texts. This mix of commodity-driven maternity magazine, somewhat similar to the commercialism of the BR Mums, and alternative e-zine critiquing the forces of commerciality sit uneasily together in a dreamworld that attempts to combine opposing discourses of commercial and alternative maternity.

While the Hip Mamas' refusal of the commercial aspects of mainstream maternity websites is not complete, the strong desire to overturn traditional notions of maternal

---

[212] Posted by *Macaronimaniac*, 'Does a bear breastfeed in the woods?' *Ariel Gore*, January 21st, 2008, available at http://arielgore.com/archives/2008_01_01_archive.html, date accessed 25/3/08.

bodies, reworking concepts of communities in the process, continues to surface in discussions. The Hip Mamas' position outside normative motherhood and their desire to "belong" in a group where difference is embraced is expressed in the *Hip Mama* website by imaginings of a contemporary "urban tribe" of Hip Mamas or "Alterna-Moms" who choose to be members of a virtual alternative maternity community.[214] The notion of community on the *Hip Mama* website is bolstered by the immediacy of personal blogs and interaction as opposed to the more impersonal feature articles which predominate in mainstream print and online magazines. *Hip Mama* blogs are often supportive in the ways that responses are formulated. Practical advice is sought and given in diverse areas such as children's activities, child support hearings, cloth nappies, sexualities (of mamas and children), and building friendships. When a blogger posts a request for information or writes of difficulties s/he are having, Hip Mamas often "send" via their replies "kisses", "hugs" and positive thoughts to the original poster.

Will the Real Hip Mama Please Write Back!

Hip Mamas generally proclaim themselves to be vegetarian, interested in alternative therapies and fashions, having tattoos and numerous piercings and being involved in some form of artistic or political activist work. Hip Mamas are also defined by their expressions of feminist sentiments. Lavender and Gore, the Hip Mamas par excellence, openly describe themselves as feminists. Viewpoints from a range of feminisms are implied in many postings where gender stereotypes and hegemonic masculinity are questioned.[215]

Unlike the BR Mums and the Bad Mothers of *BMC* whose online posts and articles are empty of sustained reflexive discussion concerning their maternal subject

---

[213] See *Hip Mama*, available at http://www.hipmama.com/. Also see Xlibris: Write Your Own Success, available at https://www2.xlibris.com/index.html, date accessed 15/5/09 and EarthJustice: Because the earth needs a good lawyer, available at v, date accessed 15/5/09.

[214] 'Alterna-Moms' is a term generally used by Hip Mamas interchangeably with the term 'Hip Mama' to indicate a mother who stands outside the realm of normative maternity.

[215] See Lu Vickers, 'Cross Dressing the War by Lu Vickers', Submitted 13/8/03, available at http://www.hipmama.com/node/12519, date accessed 15/8/03 and Helene Fisher, 'And the Bride Wore Pants by Helene Fisher', Submitted 3/8/04, available at http://www.hipmama.com/node/3507, date accessed 4/8/04. While these examples are taken from threads posted in 2003 and 2004 they are representative of a general feminist sensibility that continues to be expressed throughout the website.

positions, the Hip Mamas debate and attempt to define the meanings they attach to the term "Hip Mama". These conversation strands have periodically appeared throughout the ten years I have been involved with *Hip Mama*.[216] For instance, in a discussion thread in January 2004 concerning the definition of the maternal subject of *Hip Mama*, there are three positions the Hip Mamas defined themselves against - the soccer mom, the yuppie mama, and the Sunday school mama (steeped in a conservative morality and moralizing behaviour). A blog by Hip Mama, *Psyche* constructs 'hipness" as all that is not conventional and against notions of the "soccer mom". Psyche writes:

> I do feel more drawn to the alterna-moms out there regardless. And it is exciting to me to realize that I am still the same somewhat cool and interesting woman who had lots of interests and pursuits before Joey (child) came along. Sometimes I need to remind myself of that. Like I am not going to suddenly just morph into some conservative soccer mom. (sidenote: if J does wind up playing soccer, however, I will be there every Sat. morning to cheer for him!)[217]

Psyche's posting as well as other blogs and articles by her echo Adrienne Rich's conceptualization of motherhood as a construction of separate yet simultaneously occurring aspects incorporating a restrictive institution and an empowering strand of possibilities. In this particular example, the blogger refuses to assume the mantle of over-availability and negation of desire implicit in the subject position of the "soccer mom". However, the Hip Mama acknowledges her own desire – if her son decides to play sport - to *act as* a "soccer mom" in order to support him and participate in his life. *Psyche*'s comment abounds with ambiguity and demonstrates the impossibility of ever being completely unaffected by narratives of conventional mothering. Within this acknowledgment of the ever-present institution of motherhood, however, *Psyche* rejects conventional maternity (soccer mom) as much as she is able to while also embracing the potentially empowering strand of the maternal: positive connections with the child(ren). Thus, the Hip Mama in this example manages to fracture contemporary motherhood into an empowering potential which is willingly assumed

---

[216] For just some of the examples of these threads in which contributors state their understanding of what constitutes a Hip Mama see *Knfelix*, 'SW Portlander looking to start anti-moms group playgroup', Submitted Wednesday 10/3/04; *Sobriquet*, 'Hipmama intro from a woman who needs a "brain rein"', Submitted Friday 4/3/05; *Tracix*, 'The beauty of being a Hip Mam', Submitted Wednesday 11/8/04; Victoria Law explores the notion of activist mothers as Hip Mamas in 'I just do by Victoria Law', Submitted 7/10/07; *Greentara*, 'More Advice', Submitted Monday, 15/12/08; and, *Glassclementyne*, 'I'm back hip moms?', Submitted 30/4/09.

[217] Blog submitted by *Psyche* on Tuesday January 6 2004.

by maternal bodies while the convention/institution strand is abandoned where possible.

In the same post previously cited, *Psyche* further explored the alternative status of the Hip Mamas. She writes:

> ... maybe I'm not a "hipmama". I mean I think I am hip. (I have a tattoo! I am a liberal feminist almost-vegetarian! I am a Witch!) But. I don't feel as hip as some of these hard-rockin'', multiple piercings, goth-type mamas out there. I have a bit of a standard job, married my wonderful h.s [high school] sweetheart, and dress mostly pretty run of the mill comfy, though sometimes a bit more funky and fun. I guess there are varying degrees ...[218]

Of the ten responses to this blog nine supported the blogger's divided position concerning the constitution of Hip Mamadom as well as further fracturing traditional tropes of maternity along lines that both utilize and reject the conventional maternal. A number of participants reassured *Psyche* that she was, in fact, "hip".[219] For instance, *Melomama* writes in January 2004, that

> Being "hip" to me has nothing to do with what I call pleasure preferences – whether you dress Goth or Goodwill, listen to the Clash or classical, or whether you have a nose ring or a pearl ring. But being "hip" means tolerating all of these differences and understanding that people make their own, private choices that they feel best suits them and realizing that those choices may not always mesh with your own sensibilities.[220]

These comments attempt to undo the roping of the term "hip" to a very particular subjectivity – tattoos, piercings, artistic work, and a politics for the non-privileged - and then link the word to a broadly encompassing liberal framework. The postings broaden the notion of hip to go beyond the popular definition of fashion and "trendiness".

The site's blogs, however, also inscribe a particular subjectivity that stands for a "Hip Mama" which reveal the limits of this community. While the Hip Mamas are questioning of conventions in general and traditional maternity specifically, they are also imbricated in mainstream narratives of the maternal. A significant number of Hip Mamas who post personal blogs express support for dominant discourses including

---

[218] Blog submitted by *Psyche* on Tuesday January 6 2004.

[219] Posted by *Asherah,* Tuesday, 6th January, 2004.

[220] Posted by *melomama,* Tuesday, 6th January, 2004.

child-centred practices or intensive mothering; the regulation of female body size; and, children inheriting the father's last name.[221]

Hip Mamas are also not immune to the lure of aspirational desires to fulfill idealized notions of bourgeois achievement or to transcend the limitations of class, culture and financial circumstances. Middle-class aspirational goals such as obtaining a tertiary education, working in a professional career and financial security are foregrounded in the personal blogs. The "rags to riches" stories of Bee Lavender and Ariel Gore also fulfill aspirational fantasies of the "American Dream". It is in the narratives of "dream" fulfillment, and the broadening of notions of "hip" to include discourses of bourgeois desires and attainment that *Hip Mama* continues a subtle movement towards narratives of conventional motherhood and mainstream maternity e-texts. The gradual shifting demonstrates how the traditional is continually imported into predominantly alternative online communities. This hypertexting of dominant discourse also illustrates the inevitably fracturedness of online communities and motherhood, itself.

Hip Mama Town

In a series of postings that ran in June 2005 some Hip Mamas expressed a desire for *Hip Mama* participants to move to a small town and populate it with members of this online community. On 23rd June 2005 *Sisterstu* began the thread by writing:

> Let's all move to a little dying town somewhere and make it a hipmama town. Why not? Our kids could all run around together, we could make a kickass school Community garden? Regular community meals? [222]

This post inspired one of the largest threads in the *Hip Mama* blogs with 54 responses. *Hip Mama* blogs usually elicit under or just over ten responses.

---

[221] See *Briefcandle*, 'Snacks for a cranky husband', Submitted Monday, 29/6/09; *Peculiaroldbird*, 'To homeschool, unschool, or not ... that is the question ...' Submitted 15/4/09; *Enelesn*, 'post baby body', Submitted Tuesday 23/12/08; *Susan2005*, 'Well I think you did and are doing a great thing', Submitted Saturday 29/12/07; *Tatumnsmummy*, 'Best Prego shirts ever', Submitted Thursday 9/11/06; *Selahsmom*, 'I was never a huge fan', Submitted Tuesday, 21/6/05; *Jmoon*, 'I caved on this one ... and it', Submitted Monday, 20/12/04; and, *Merrylynda*, 'This is the way I feel about', Submitted Friday 26/11/04.

[222] Blog submitted by *Sisterstu*, Thursday 23/6/05.

Reinvigorating a "dying town somewhere" with a "hipmama" presence echoes notions, at the cornerstone of Rheingold's theories: that contemporary RL communities are "dying" and need to be revived and that cyber-communities perform this task. One Hip Mama explicitly describes these ideas in her blog. In the 'Hip Mama town' thread, *Tansy* states

> There are a lot of mothers at the parks I go to with ds [dear son] – and I look longingly at all those who aren't there by themselves and are actually with mama friends ... this comes back to ... our society's lack of community..[223]

While Rheingold focuses on cyber(cultural)space as the locus for a re-enchantment of community, the Hip Mamas in this series of posts fantasize about their existent cyber-group colonizing RL space. Hip Mama, *Selahsmom*, also posting in the 'Hip Mama town' thread aptly sums up the fantasy of an alternative maternity community in the vein of a Rheingoldian community. She says:

> I can picture it now ... the kiddies running around in the midst of such a warm and kid-friendly environment that parents were completely at ease and happy to let them go and meet whomever they wanted to ... Lots of kids of all ages to play with ... Mamas working together in their community gardens, composting together, sharing cooking tips on a daily basis, many friends, many open and frank discussions, etc ... Wow, it sounds so amazing.[224]

This passage is almost a direct example taken word for word of Czech writer Milan Kundera's notion of kitsch which he describes in his novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.[225] He argues that kitsch relies upon straight forward images widely shared. According to Kundera kitsch works to close down irony and questioning in texts. Thus, *Selahsmom*'s blog opens up a complete fantasy of a Hip Mama town while shutting down the drive to challenge conventional narratives that elsewhere on the site marks the Hip Mamas' alternative maternity.

The Hip Mama longings to translate online community to RL expressed in these blogs reinvests the notion of community with utopian Rheingoldian narratives.

---

[223] Blog Submitted by *Tansy*, Saturday, 25/6/05.

[224] Blog Submitted by *Selahsmom*, Friday, 24/6/05.

[225] Thanks to Barbara Baird for directing me to Milan Kundera's concept of political kitsch. Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, translated by the Czech by Michael Henry Heim, (London: Faber and Faber, [1984] 2004).

Community -online and RL - is then fetishized and essentialized as inevitably positive for all.[226] This nostalgic desire speaks of the difficulty of living an alternative maternity in a culture saturated by dominant discourses of motherhood.

In the discussion thread concerning setting up a *Hip Mama* town, a number of posts outlined their concerns about the successful translation of the virtual community to a RL setting where inhabitants were unable to leave the group in absolute terms by logging out of online space. *Trula* blogs in 2005 that "I just think that our many differences, while tolerable in a virtual community would not be tolerated in a real life community."[227] Issues of differing philosophies, and tensions along lines of child rearing practices as well as race, class and musical tastes were foregrounded in a number of posts. These issues are summed up in another of *Trula*'s blogs also posted in 2005:

> ... Hipmamas on this board don't even share the same philosophies so I feel sorta cynical on the whole hipmama town thing. I think when we think of a Hipmama town we're thinking of a town filled with folks just like ourselves ... and that's not gonna happen .... Some ... look like alternative, hippy, too-cool-for-school mamas, while others look very ordinary and traditional. Some hipmamas homeschool, some don't. Some hipmamas are even republicans!!! And most hipmamas (based on the pictures I've seen and the events I've gone to) are white, heterosexual, and legally married so there would be little racial, sexuality, or economic diversity in said town. LOL, do you see what I mean? So while it's all cool to fantasize about a hipmama town, the reality would be quite different.[228]

Despite other Hip Mamas writing about various divergences from conventional maternity along the lines of race, class, education, sexuality, able-bodiness and presentation, *Trula*'s blog suggests that these differences form a minority presence in the *Hip Mama* community. The Hip Mamas even differ about difference. However, another Hip Mama, *SunshineDaydream*, supports *Trula*'s cataloguing of the tensions that could arise along sites of difference in a RL Hip Mama town. In a blog posted on 24/6/05 *SunshineDaydream* states:

---

[226] For a discussion of this issue see Bell, *Cybercultures*, pp. 92-112. See also Steve Jones, (ed), *Cybersociety: Computer-Mediated Communication and Community*, (London: Sage, 1995).

[227] Blog Submitted by *Trula*, Friday, 24/6/05.

[228] Blog Submitted by *Trula*, Thursday 23/6/05.

> Trula I totally think that you have a valid point here. Reality is rarely as good as the fantasy. Your comment made me think about what keeps people coming back here and being members here when there are those differences? Do you think it is just because it isn't real?[229]

SunshineDaydream reinstates the notion of the physical domain as the "real" while reinforcing the idea that cyber(cultural)space is the realm of illusion as it is "not real".[230] The blogs that write of the insurmountability of the translation of *Hip Mama* community from the virtual to RL underline two major issues concerning online and RL communities. First, the immediacy and convenience of being able to log on at any time and interact with other, sometimes like-minded, individuals and then being able to logout provides a simple solution to dealing with difficulties that may arise from online expressions of difference. These *Hip Mama* blogs also speak of the inevitability of conflict within and exclusions from any tight-knit collective, especially online groups.[231]

Mama Race

The tensions documented in the expression of different viewpoints on the constitution of a Hip Mama and the *Hip Mama* community exposes the fissures in both the body of the Hip Mama and the *Hip Mama* community. These kind of fractures in the construction of the Hip Mama and her online community are also identifiable along lines of race. From November 1999 to May 2009 there were almost two hundred *Hip Mama* discussion threads that foregrounded race. (This contrasts to the BR Mum and the *BMC* sites where race is rarely mentioned). These range from posts discussing political action and/or academic work focusing on race[232] to descriptions of the hardships experienced as a direct result of identifying or being perceived as a woman

---

[229] Blog Submitted by *SunshineDaydream*, Friday, 24/6/05.

[230] There are many texts that discuss this notion of the corporeal being "real" while cyber(cultural)space is ephemeral. Cyberpunk texts like William Gibson's *Neuromancer* suggest that journeys into cyber(cultural)space mean leaving the "meat" behind and existing solely as data. Theorist, Donna Haraway, however, writes nuanced accounts of the cyborg body, the melding of "meat" and machine. In his text *Cybercultures*, Bell offers an overview of this discussion, pp. 140-160.

[231] For discussions of conflict in online groups see Bell, *Cybercultures*, Turkle, *Life On Screen*, Kevin Robins and Frank Webster, *Times of the Technoculture: From the Information Society to the Virtual Life*, (London: Routledge, 1999).

[232] See *Yantra*, 'Dorothy Roberts [author of *Killing The Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty]* Lecture', Submitted, 24/11/03; *Smilinv*, 'Canadian Mamas ... call

of colour.[233] Throughout the ten years I have been involved with *Hip Mama*, posts concerning race and racism have generated considerable discussion.

The tensions that reveal the fractures that divide *Hip Mama* along lines of race are exemplified in a discussion thread begun by a comment from *Trula*, posted in 2004, in which she attempts to explore the notion of white privilege. This thread is one of the largest on the *Hip Mama* site that I have seen, having inspired ninety-seven responses. *Trula* cites United States academic Peggy McIntosh's definition of white privilege as "an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and bank checks".[234]. In this previous thread Hip Mama, *Writer Mom* posted a number of questions regarding racism in defence of her own position as a white woman who did not consider herself to be racist.[235] *Trula* then answered a number of these questions.

> 3. What kind of participation in the discussion of privilege and racism can a white person contribute in a way that will help change and/or be agreeable to a person of color?
>
> > Primarily by not interjecting or interrupting to exclaim 'well that's not racism!' or 'it's really a class issue!' or 'all white people are not racist!' and the like whenever people of color are trying to communicate their experiences.
>
> 3b. Is the above even possible ... or should white people sit and listen and shut up?
>
> > Yeah, the above is possible, however I have found that most white people, in my experience, feel personally attacked when discussing racism. They seem unable to distinguish between an attack on racism and an attack on their culture, which leads me to believe that racism is so ingrained within white American culture that even they don't see a separation between the two, however subconscious this awareness is.

---

for help', Monday 15/11/04 [a request for assistance with a depictions of race in the media]; and, *GodessLissa*, 'FUCK and the First Amendment', Submitted 9/4/05.

[233] *Mamanopajamas*, 'any Native American mamas here?', Submitted Friday 3/6/05 and *Mamaneen*, 'Just another couple of realities from "post-racial America', Submitted 8/1/09. *Blueorange*, 'a conversation I overheard at the Y', Submitted, Wed 22/6/05 and *Be*, 'we want them here', Submitted 22/6/05.

[234] Peggy McIntosh quoted in *Trula*'s blog, 'White Privilege', Submitted Saturday, 28/8/04. Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack", available at http://www.lilithgallery.com/feminist/modern/WhitePrivilege-MalePrivilege.html, date accessed 17/9/09.

[235] White Privilege' thread begun by *Trula*, Submitted Saturday 28/8/04, 97.

> Sometimes the other person or people begin to understand that I am not attacking white people but racism itself.

4. Are ALL "white" people currently alive complicit in privilege and/or racism?

> I would say yes, most are. Most certainly do not reject privilege when it happens to them or even to be aware that it is happening.

Responses from Hip Mamas *Annebanane*, *Traci*, *Velma* and *Mennelle* to *Trula*'s direct assertion that white people need to address issues of racism were grounded in an open acknowledgement of the anger at the injustices of racism felt by people of colour and directed at those who possess white privilege.[236] For example, Hip Mama *Annebanane* who identifies as white posted in September 2004,

> Why is it so hard to hear someone's anger over racism. Maybe Trula really is angry at white people. What is wrong with that? I have noticed that a lot of white people (myself included) have a really hard time hearing any anger directed towards them. Why? I get angry at men sometimes, especially when I have been in a really sexist situation. I guess I find it a bit much for white people to want anger over racism to be expressed a certain way that is acceptable to them.[237]

In a move that echoes Peggy McIntosh's arguments concerning white privilege, *Annebanane* links white privilege to unearned masculine entitlement in a male dominated western culture. This type of blog, however, was in the minority in the various threads about race and racism in the 2004 Hip Mama posts. Other posts from self-identified white Hip Mamas were often defensive and personally attacking of the mamas of colour, especially *Trula*. For instance, *Diva* responded with the following:

> You [Trula] pass judgment on everyone because, of course, only YOU know what racism is ... and then you leave ... and refuse to deal with any fallout or questions stemming from your initial rants. You also belittle people constantly and then feign ignorance when confronted with it. Who do you think you are?[238]

Diva's personalization of the conflict did not perceive that the personal is informed and shaped by issues that include race, class, gender, able-bodiedness and education.

---

[236] See the thread started by *Offmyback*, '**Hijackin'!** Ten Questions', Submitted Tuesday, 31/8/04, 94; 'About Racism' thread begun by *Rollermama*, Submitted Monday 23/8/04, 37; and, the 'White Privilege' thread begun by *Trula*, Submitted Saturday 28/8/04, 97.

Other self-identified white Hip Mamas, *Carmela* and *Jazz_Bird* attempted to compartmentalize issues of racism and maternity by stating that the *Hip Mama* blogs are an online gathering point to discuss concerns related to mothering which, to them, do not necessarily include issues of race. Hip Mama Carmela supported *Diva*'s stance on the way in which racism was being discussed by women of colour in the blogs and then posted on 31/8/04 that

> I know that I am not alone when I say that the appeal of this board is that it gives Moms a place to gather and talk about issues involving being a MOTHER in an ever changing world. .... I personally do not read your [Trula] posts any longer because, and I preface this by stating that I am not a racist, I believe that racism is an issue that does not affect my ability to be a good mother, and I know that it is something that you like to post about. This may be a shocking statement to make on such a board, but it is the truth. [239]

The responses of the Hip Mamas of colour to this reinstatement of conventional white maternity were typically feisty and committed to the construction of a raced maternity. On 31/8/04 *Mamaneen* exclaimed,

> Not an issue? This never ceases to amaze me. I think I posted this on some other thread here awhile back, but "colorblindness" is really just a way for white people to pretend that everyone is white like them. If kids are gonna learn to respect the experience of each human they interact with, that has to involve an awareness of the fact that those humans are going to have had different contexts for their experience – women will have been coping with sexism; people of colour with racism; poor folks with classism, et cetera. Pretending that things are "not an issue" doesn't make them all better – it merely displays the privilege of the person playing let's pretend.[240]

Mamaneen's naming of *Carmela*'s failure to acknowledge her own (white) race privilege underlines the insidiousness of conventional discourses of maternity and race that define maternal bodies as white and apolitical as well as rendering whiteness invisible. The day after *Mamaneen*'s blog was posted *Trula* supported her stance on raced maternal bodies. *Trula* wrote

> If you believe that racism is not an issue that affects your ability to be a good mother, then I wonder why you like Hipmama. It is a shocking statement to make on this board because it is one of the issues Hipmama is

---

[237] *Annebanane*, 'I don't know if it has already been said', Submitted Wednesday 1/9/04.

[238] *Diva*, 'Again you', Submitted Monday 30/8/04.

[239] *Carmela*, 'Trula, be nice ... you do have', Submitted Tuesday 31/8/04.

[240] *Mamaneen*, 'Not an Issue?', Submitted Tuesday 31/8/04.

> committed to. This was one of the things that attracted me to the original Hipmama boards, that here was a group of mostly white feminists committed to addressing race issues head on. I am glad to see that this spirit is still alive in some posters here, old and new.[241]

In this comment *Trula*'s discursive strategy cleverly manages the discussion so that she both acknowledges an active white feminist presence on the *Hip Mama* forums while also refusing to allow herself, as a woman of colour, to be excluded from debate on the site.

The fiery confrontations involved in the White Privilege discussion thread in 2004 have not surfaced again to the same extent in the *Hip Mama* blogs since that time. From 2005 onwards postings regarding race tend to focus on personal experience, political action and/or education. These blogs, from 2005 to 2009 typically involve mamas of colour writing about their experiences of racial discrimination as in *Freedamomma*'s exploration of the stereotype of the "strong black woman" and *Mamaneen*'s relating the difficulties in passing for white, both of which were written in 2005.[242] More recent blogs emphasize the lack of change in the low standards of living that many women of colour continue to endure in contemporary North America.[243] In blogs that mention white privilege the emphasis is on educating oneself to identify this unearned entitlement but details regarding how this could productively be dealt with are lacking.[244] With women of colour posting about political action and racism while white Hip Mamas briefly acknowledge white privilege the *Hip Mama* blogs are currently still engaged in discussions concerning race. While insightful comments about race still occur in the blogs the heated and prolonged debates – typically from the period 2000-2005 - have abated. I can only speculate about the reasons for this situation. The Hip Mamas involved in the strident conflicts are not currently blogging on the site, perhaps having left *Hip Mama* to join other online communities or posting under different names. Perhaps threads on the topic of race, which usually involve posts by and for women of colour, are perceived by white Hip Mamas to be outside their experience and/or interest and, therefore, not an area on which they choose to comment.

---

[241] *Trula*, 'Eh', Submitted Wednesday 1/9/04.

[242] *Freedamomma*, I am not a "Strong Black Woman' (Rant)', submitted Monday 6/6/005 and *Mamaneen*, 'In my experience', Submitted Wednesday 8/6/05.

[243] *Mamaneen*, 'Just another couple of realities from "post-racial America"', Submitted 8/1/09.

From 2001 to 2003 the *Hip Mama* discussion boards were closed down. Gore and Lavender did not post an official announcement regarding the closure. However, on her personal website Lavender responded to a comment made by a Hip Mama who stated that she thought the forums had been closed as a result "of all the people dogging [insulting and fighting with] each other".[245] Lavender partially agreed with this assessment. She writes generally and briefly that "The social drama at the end of the boards was ugly, incomprehensible."[246] Nevertheless, Lavender also states that as well as these issues there were other logistical and structural concerns that impacted upon the decision to close down the *Hip Mama* discussion boards.

From my observations, the discussions about racism which became so heated in 2000 were a major contributing factor to the closure of the *Hip Mama* forums. The message board posts and writings from the old site have not been archived so online records of these cyber meltdowns do not exist. I have relied on my notes taken while still on leave. Before and after the closing down of Hip Mama discussions erupted in accusations and counter accusations of racism, who was an authentically raced subject and who had been oppressed by racism. When the *Hip Mama* forums were reinstated the acrimonious conflict over race issues was referred to only obliquely by the Hip Mamas.[247] Posting in July 2004, however, *Trula* cited the closure of the *Hip Mama* site from 2001-2003 as an example of the extreme action that may be taken in order to end online conflict.[248] The depth of this conflict and the drastic resolution of closing down the *Hip Mama* forums suggest that the topics of race and racism are so potentially incendiary, that it is extremely difficult to maintain engaged and critical debate that does not break down into accusations and defensiveness. The rejection of a formal moderator on the site, due to feminist notions of collective discussion, accords agency and autonomy to the participants. The absence of a moderator, however, as well as the prominent position that discourses of race and racism hold in United States culture and politics, also contributed to the extreme action of shutting down the forums for a period of time.

---

[244] *Mercury*, 'Yah, I know what you mean', Submitted, Thursday 5/3/09.

[245] Bee Lavender, *Archives*, 7/28/02, available at http://www.foment.net/7.02.journal.html, date accessed 13/10/09.

[246] Ibid

[247] *Jaybah*, 'Hipmama is back with a fury!', Submitted Wednesday 22/10/03.

[248] *Trula*, 'Please stop this', Submitted 12/7/04.

The tensions and conflicts evident in the blogs concerning the Hip Mama body and community as well as race demonstrate that maternity is not a universal state. It is dependent on context as maternal bodies are the locus for intersections of sometimes competing discourses of race, class, and gender. Similarly, virtual communities, especially those concerned with maternal bodies, are not utopias of maternity built from "common bonds of motherhood". They are, like RL communities, and, as David Bell argues, fraught with conflict, differences, and competing desires.[249]

Breeders

Standing outside much of the mainstream RL and maternal community life, Hip Mamas reflexively consider and critique discourses of maternity. Their feisty take on maternity extends Andrea O'Reilly's notion of the Mother Outlaw into cyber(cultural)space. They attempt to fulfill their desire for alternative communities by the attempted detraditionalization of online gatherings to promote subversive versions of conventional motherhood. *Hip Mama*'s remediation of the content and format of the zine into a vibrant e-zine promotes discourses of maternal politics, sexuality and creativity. These narratives assist in the construction of an alternative Hip Mama body and online maternity community. The Hip Mama body and community, however, are fractured along many lines. In this section I have focused on several fault lines that split the Hip Mama body – lifestyle, personal style, desire for universality and race. The moments of bitter dissent written in the *Hip Mama* posts aptly describes the fragmentedness of online maternity communities as opposed to myths of universal narratives of motherhood and community. While the Hip Mamas open up space for narratives of alternative maternity and attempt to form a new kind of community, in the same vein as David Bell's conceptualization of contemporary fluid community, threads of longing or immersion in conventional motherhood and/or Rheingoldian gatherings still emerge. Although these strands of traditional motherhood flow through the site, *Hip Mama*'s vibrant and witty challenge to conventional maternity still makes it the stuff of nightmares for "conservative America" and beyond.

---

[249] Bell, *Cybercultures*, pp. 108-110.

Conclusion

My hunch that I would find subversive maternal bodies in cyber(cultural)space is supported in my investigations of maternity websites - texts in the first realm of the cyber-domain under examination in this thesis. These explorations of maternity e-texts, however, also reveal that the Good Mother and her happy home – the institution of motherhood – still haunt many of the maternity narratives both online and in RL. The BR Mums' websites welcome the Good Mother in remediations of mainstream print maternity magazines. The conventions of form and content of glossy maternity magazines are remediated and intensified by the websites' mobilization of hypermediacy and immediacy. Hypermediacy hypertexts the reader/interactor from mainpage links to many nodes of information and products. Immediacy enables rapid communication and information gathering which are fundamental to community-formation and maintenance. The twin forces of hypermediacy and immediacy also fuel the biotourism and the commodity-drenched shopping imaginary of the websites. From this heady mix of biotouristic desire and expert-sanctioned hunger for products and services these websites join forces in maternity communities that profess a Rheingoldian sensibility and fabricate and market a slick cyber version of the Good Mother – the BR Mum.

While traditional tropes of maternity are frequently and openly supported in the BR Mum websites narratives of conventional motherhood are both challenged and reinstated by the Bad Mothers of the *BMC*. Although *BMC* subverts normative motherhood through its humorous puncturing of conventional representations of mothering, the website also constructs a particular white middle class, married heterosexual professional maternity. Thus, the *BMC* community is grounded in specifics of class, sexuality, culture, geography and nation.

Like *BMC Hip Mama* writes back to direct remediations of traditional motherhood in mainstream magazines. *Hip Mama*, however, moves further along the spectrum of alternative online publications than does *BMC*. The Hip Mamas remediate the DIY ethic and politics of the print zine to literally open up (cyber)space in order to write their own stories of mothering. From these stories there emerge discourses of maternal bodies that are political, raced, sexual, creative and empowered. As a result of this

feisty maternity that overturns conventional narratives of motherhood, the Hip Mamas extend Andrea O'Reilly's notion of Mother Outlaws into cyber(cultural)space.[250]

While *Hip Mama* constructs a maternity that is more alternative to normative motherhood than either the BR Mum websites or the *BMC* the Hip Mamas are, inevitably haunted by spectres of conventional maternity. Despite the potential for an inclusive and global online community as described by David Bell, there is a longing detectable amongst the *Hip Mamas* for an alternative Rheingoldian or utopian online and RL community that is a haven for the site's participants.[251] Nevertheless, heated discussions on topics like race demonstrate the fracturedness of the *Hip Mama* community.

My investigations of this first realm of cyber(cultural)space under consideration in this thesis – the cyber-domain of websites - reveals numerous sightings of the Good Mother and also a number of maternal bodies that stand against her normative discourse. Now I continue my examinations of constructions and deconstructions of representations of maternity in what I identify as a second cyber domain – CD ROMs.

---

[250] Andrea O'Reilly, *Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering*, (Toronto: Women's Press, 2004). See also Andrea O'Reilly, *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born*, (Albany: SUNY, 2004).

[251] Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community,* available at http://www.rheingold.com/vc/book/intro.html. See also H. Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier,* (London: MIT Press, 2000). David Bell, *An Introduction to Cybercultures*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

Chapter 4

Patchwork Girl

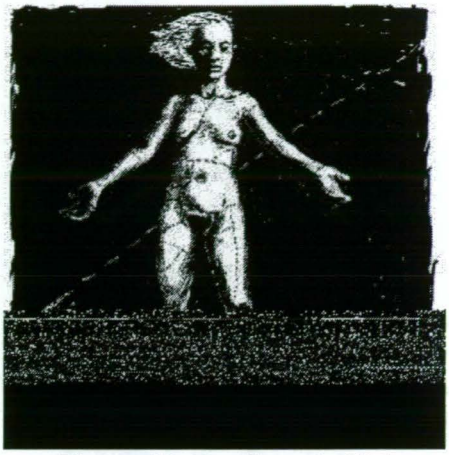


Figure 12: Patchwork Girl

As cyber(cultural)space is most closely identified in the popular imagination with the Internet and the World Wide Web, the examination of Web pages was an obvious place to begin my investigation of representations of cyber-maternity. Cyber(cultural)space, however, is not solely contained by the hardware of the Internet or the multiple nodes of the Web. I argue that cyber(cultural)space leaks through our imaginations, ideas and experiences emerging in fiction, film, and television shows as well as on our computer screens.[1] Drawing on Christine Hine's notion of cyber(cultural)space "as culture and as cultural artefact" and David Bell's concept of this domain as "product of and producer of culture simultaneously" my discussion shifts focus from websites to CD ROM hyperfiction.[2] CD ROMs possess the hypertext and graphical capabilities available on the Web which enable the production of digital works of fiction and art. The qualities of hypertext and cyber(cultural)space are melded in a skilful manner in Shelley Jackson's CD ROM multimedia work, *Patchwork Girl* (1995) (Figure 12).[3] The text is important partly because it has

---

1 Christine Hine, *Virtual Ethnography*, (London: Sage, 2000). See also David Bell, *An Introduction to Cybercultures*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

2 Hine, *Virtual Ethnography*, p. 39. See also Bell, *Cybercultures*, pp. 1-3.

3 Shelley Jackson. *Patchwork Girl*. Environment: Storyspace. Cambridge, Mass: Eastgate Systems, 1995.
Figure 12: Patchwork Girl sourced from Jackson. *Patchwork Girl*.

become a canonical work gathering critical acclaim. *Patchwork Girl* is also an innovative and engaging hyperfiction.

Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* is awash in maternal flows and forces that I interrogate in this chapter of the thesis. Jackson returns to Mary Shelley's novel, *Frankenstein* and rewrites the destruction of the female monster.[4] Instead of being destroyed, the female monster is secretly re-created in a re-birthing by the author Mary Shelley, who becomes a character in the hyperfiction. Shelley Jackson describes Mary Shelley stitching together the female body parts that Frankenstein had torn asunder. Maternal creator and author, Mary Shelley falls in love with the creature and becomes her lover. The monster leaves Mary Shelley and embarks upon journeys leading to and through the United States of America. After a number of adventures and an almost literal breakdown(away) of body parts, the monster dies (in the early 1990s).

Patchwork Girl is both a successful cult text and a highly acclaimed hypertext fiction.[5] Feminist techno-theorist, N. Katherine Hayles states that the text is "Wonderfully rich and complex".[6] Iconic hypertext theorist, George Landow writes that *Patchwork Girl* is "Brilliantly conceived and beautifully written".[7] Another early hypertext theorist and practitioner, Michael Joyce, also praises Shelley's work in an extended and poetical passage:

> Hypertext's next step .. Patchwork Girl is spectacular in every sense, from RayBan to Debordian to Cirque du Soleil ...This is a work of dream and

---

4 Subsequent references to the novel *Frankenstein* refer to the following edition: Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus*, edited by Paul Hunter, Norton Critical Edition, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1996).

5 N.Katherine Hayles, 'Flickering Connectivities in the work of Shelley Jackson: The Importance of Media-specific Analysis', *Postmodern Culture*, 10, 2 January (2000), available at http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern_culture/v010/10.2hayles.html, date accessed 4/7/02; George Landow: *Hypertext 2.0: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, [1992] 1997); and, Michael Joyce, 'Nonce Upon Some Times: Rereading Hypertext Fiction', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 43, 3 Fall (1997): 579-597, available at http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/modern_fiction_studies/v043/43.3joyce.html.

6 Hayles, 'Flickering Connectivities'.

7 George Landow, 'Stitching together narrative, sexuality, self: Shelley Jackson's "Patchwork Girl"', August 2000, available at http://www.altx.com/ebr/reviews/rev3/landow.htm, date accessed 3/9/07.

> desire and defying boundaries, an electronic collage, a theatre of windows, and a cyborg song of communion and reunion.[8]

Jackson makes good use of these statements praising her work in a review section on her website, *Ineradicable Stain*.[9]

From 2001, *Patchwork Girl* has been a recommended text set by the New South Wales Board of Studies in order to fulfil the multimedia component of an English Extension subject for students studying for the Higher School Certificate.[10] The text is also prescribed reading/viewing in a number of courses in both national and international universities such as the Queensland University of Technology, the University of California, Los Angeles, and Brown University.[11]

Just as eclectic and boundary challenging as her work, Shelley Jackson is a writer and illustrator of books, hypermedia artist and book store worker.[12] She has a degree

---

[8] Michael Joyce, 'Nonce Upon Some Times'.

[9] Shelley Jackson's website, *Ineradicable Stain*, available at http://www.ineradicablestain.com/reviews.html

[10] See *N.S.W HSC Online*, New South Wales Department of Education and Training, Charles Sturt University, available at http://hsc.csu.edu.au/english/extension1/language_values/reading_writing/reading_writing_intro/intro.html

See the Board of Studies, N.S.W., English Stage 6, Prescriptions: Area of Study, Electives and Texts, Higher School Certificate 2001-2003, p. 33, available at

http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_hsc/pdf_doc/english_prestexts.pdf

Patchwork Girl is currently a prescribed text in the N.S.W Higher School English curriculum dated from 2004-2007.

See, also, the blogs of Australian academic, Angela Thomas who writes enthusiastically about the inclusion of *Patchwork Girl* in the N.S.W high school English studies' curriculum. http://anya.blogsome.com/2005/08/06/stitching-texts-gender-and -geography-in-frankenstein-and-patchwork-girl/

[11] Axel Bruns and Donna Lee Brien, 'Teaching Electronic Writing: A Report from the Creative Industries Frontline', *Creative Industries Faculty,* Queensland University of Technology, available at http://snurb.info/files/31-03-03%20Teaching%20Electronic%20Creative%20Writing.doc.

See English 495 E – Teaching Literature and Writing With Technology, Department of English, University of California, Los Angeles, United States of America, available at http://www.english.ucla.edu/ta/tacsite/495Esyllabus.htm

See also *Patchwork Girl Comments*, Brown University, U.S.A available at http://scholars.nus.edu.sg/cpace/ht/pg/pgov.html

[12] Before *Patchwork Girl*, Jackson wrote and illustrated two children's books, *The Old Woman and the Wave* and *The Alchemical Dog.* She illustrated a number of other childrens' books: Kim L. Siegelson's *Escape South*, Cynthia C. Defelice's *Willy's Silly Grandma*, Rebecca C. Jones' *Great-Aunt Martha*, and Orchard Book's *Nancy Farmer, Do You Know Me.*

in studio art from Stanford University and a Masters degree in creative writing from Brown University. Her short fictions have been published in the literary journals *Conjunctions, fence, Crowd, Grand Street* and the *Kenyon Review*.[13] Jackson's only work as a writer that is in the medium of hard copy print is her book, *The Melancholy of Anatomy: Stories*.[14]. As well as *Patchwork Girl*, Jackson published another hypertext, *My Body* (1997) which also explores notions of femininity and monstrosity.[15]

Patchwork Girl feeds off and remediates the Frankenstein story of an irresponsible father who seeks to appropriate female reproductive capabilities and then abandons his creation as he views his offspring through the lens of abjection. Maternity and fragments of flesh lie at the heart of both texts. While the female monster in *Frankenstein* is torn apart by the scientist's fear of feminine reproduction, Patchwork Girl is painstakingly stitched together by a loving mother/author and intrigued reader/interactors.

Shelley Jackson speaks at length about the hypertexty inspirations for *Patchwork Girl* in the *Frankenstein* myths:

> I like to think about Mary Shelley, age nineteen or so, hanging out with these oh-so-sensitive, even hysterical young poets ...I imagine they treated her with some condescension. She was not a writer, yet. A general challenge was issued, but it was Mary who stuck with it, and wrote a novel that became the quintessential modern myth ... Mary Shelley ... likes monsters; she birthed one ... Or rather, two but Mary Shelley's second child, a patchwork girl as big and bad (as in baaad) as her brother, was ripped apart before the last thread was knotted. Which may have been a mercy killing; in the world Shelley knew, there could be no happy monsters. But only because of bad dad. A motherless monster with a shiftless dad runs amok, but what about a monster with a loving mother? I

---

[13] These literary journals all have online versions: *Conjunctions,* available at www.conjunctions.com

fence, available at http://www.fencemag.com/v9nl/

Crowd, available at http://www.crowdmagazine.com/

Grand Street, available at www.grandstreet.com/

Kenyon Review, available at http://www.kenyon-review.org/

[14] Shelley Jackson, *The Melancholy of Anatomy: Stories*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2002). This collection of short stories plays upon Robert Burton's book, *The Anatomy of Melancholy,* published in 1621.

[15] Shelley Jackson, *My Body*, available at http://www.altx.com/thebody/, date accessed 21/2/05.

> took up that inquiry, but - the Frankenstein monster having brought his tragic trajectory to a fiery end - I was more curious about Mary's second child. I might believe that women have a little more experience in growing up monstrous and still getting by. My monster is crucially more adaptive, wry, and made strong as well as handicapped by her monstrosity.[16]

From conception, *Patchwork Girl* is impregnated with a maternity that goes beyond conventional notions of the maternal to not only embrace but also to desire hybridity, transgression, monstrosity and fragmentation. N. Katherine Hayles claims with regard to hypertext that "a new medium will enact and express a new kind of subjectivity".[17] I argue that one of the subjectivities that Jackson's hypertext births is that of the fragmented queer monstrous maternal. In this text, the maternal body is constructed as a "kick-ass" postmodern phenomena of fragmented identity and queer sexuality.

Most contemporary theorists' engagements with *Patchwork Girl* focus on the fleshy challenges to notions of unified identity that the text offers but they are mute on the issue of maternal embodiment. This silence concerning maternal materiality in *Patchwork Girl* enacts a disembodiment of maternal bodies. In my examinations of the text I attempt to restore the flesh to fleshless maternal bodies without reducing them to brute physical *things*. In order to do this, I begin by discussing some of the capabilities and effects of hypertext. I investigate the possibilities of hypertext as a feminist form of writing. Having explored some of the features and potentialities of hypertext that enable the construction of *Patchwork Girl*, I introduce her and briefly discuss some of the critical responses to the text in order to consider some of the ideas concerning maternity and monstrosity that circulate through the hyperfiction. I discuss maternal/authorial desire and lived experience in the book that is closely tied to *Patchwork Girl* - Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. From this discussion, notions of the intermeshing of maternity and monstrosity arise. I then turn to Rosi Braidotti's concept of women as culturally positioned as potential monsters.[18] Finally, I make use of N. Katherine Hayles' concept of the flickering signifier, Rosi Braidotti's notion of

---

[16] Mark Amerika, 'Stitch Bitch: The Hypertext Author as Cyborg-Femme Narrator', *Amerika On-Line* #7, 15/03/98, available at http://www.heise.de/tp/english/inhalt/kolu/3193/1.html

[17] Hayles, 'Flickering Connectivities'.

[18] Rosi Braidotti, 'Signs of Wonder and Traces of Doubt: on Teratology and Embodied Difference', in *Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs: Feminist Confrontations with Science, Medicine and Cyberspace*, edited by Nina Lykke and Rosi Braidotti, (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1996), pp. 135-152.

the monster as a shifter and Judith Halberstam's idea that the monster is a "fluid porous screen" in order to interrogate *Patchwork Girl*'s monstrous queer maternity.[19]

Hypertext

The type of writing that is known as hypertext is usually, but not always, electronic. In contrast to hard copy print texts where information and/or narratives are usually set out in a linear and sequential manner, hypertexts utilize links to construct a multiplicity of stories and pathways. Software engineer/filmmaker Ted Nelson is generally, credited with coining the term "hypertext" in the early 1960s.[20] Nelson first used the term "hypertext" in *Literary Machines* (1981) to describe any form of non-sequential writing.[21] An example of a hard copy print hypertext system is the conventional card catalogue that was used in library reference sections. While Nelson applied his notion of hypertext to a literary function that enabled authors to create multiple versions of their text, the term later became popularized in reference to linked writing available by means of computers. It is only with the development of computer technologies that hypertext as a narrative form is being more fully utilized.

Hypertext, itself, is often defined against conventional hard copy print texts which are traditionally linear, sequential and hierarchical. Hypermedia critic Jay David Bolter argues that electronic hypertext documents are remediations of hard copy print works.[22] In a book pages are usually arranged in a sequence whereas hypertext makes use of links to forge a multiplicity of pathways through a text which is composed of a series of nodes. These sections of text or nodes are also referred to as pages, frames or topics. The text that forms the node is usually written so that it stands alone and does

---

[19] See Hayles, 'Flickering Connectivities'; _____, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999); Braidotti, 'Signs of Wonder'; and Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995).

[20] See Chris Boraski, 'History of Hypertext and the Web', available at http://www.boraski.com/www/hypertext.html, date accessed 2/5/07. See also Landow, *Hypertext 2.0*, p. 3.

[21] Ted Nelson, *Literary Machines: The report on, and of, Project Xanadu Concerning Word Processing, Electronic Publishing, Hypertext, Thinkertoys, Tomorrow's Intellectual Revolution, and Certain Other Topics Including Knowledge, Education and Freedom* (Sausalito, California: Mindful Press, 1981).

[22] Jay David Bolter, *Writing Space Computers, Hypertext and the Remediation of Print*, 2nd Ed., (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Eribaum Associates, Inc., 2001).

not depend upon the reader/interactor possessing prior knowledge of previous nodes. These blocks of text are known as lexias which is a term that hypertext theory appropriates from the work of literary theorist, Roland Barthes.[23] George Landow defines the term "lexia" as blocks of written text which are then linked and sometimes combined with images, sound and/or animation to form hypertexts.[24] Links enable reader/interactors to move rapidly or slowly from one node to another in physical acts of cross-referencing which render the entire reading of the text non-sequential. The addition of sound, images and/or video further diversifies the possibilities of click-linking and its complex connections and disconnections. Texts that are constructed in a similar fashion to hypertexts but also incorporate sound, images and video into the document are categorized as hypermedia.

Cultural theorists David Bell and Rob Shields argue that links are simultaneously a technical part of the fabric of hypertexts and hypermedia works as well as being encoded with information that situates them as part of the cybertext.[25] Shields claims that "links cannot be treated as merely thresholds or passages to other pages. The link is both part of the text and an index caught on the threshold of departure, signalling to another page of text".[26] Software ("Footprints" and "cookies") has been developed that enable the tracking of a reader/interactor's progress through various sites. Generally, however, surfing the Net or exploring a cybertext is a journey whereby the viewer/user explores links but also, at times, becomes lost or blocked by a dead end where the travelling ceases.

Many, if not all, of the qualities of hypertexts and hypermedia works suggest multiplicity and a collaborative interactivity that troubles traditional notions of literary

---

[23] Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, Translated by Richard Miller, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976).

[24] George Landow, 'The Definition of Hypertext and Its History as a Concept', in *The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*, [Pages 3-4 in print version, The John Hopkins University Press, 1992], available at http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/cpace/ht/jhup/history.html, date accessed 17/4/2005.

[25] David Bell, *Cybercultures* and Rob Shields, 'Hypertext links: the ethic of the index and its space-time effects' in *The World Wide Web and Contemporary Cultural Theory: Magic, Metaphor, Power*, edited by Andrew Herman and Thomas Swiss. (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 145-160. See also Deborah Heath, Erin Koch, Barbara Ley, and Michael Montoya,. "Nodes and Queries:Linking Locations in Networked Fields of Inquiry." *American Behavioral Scientist* 43 (1999): 450-63.

[26] Shields, 'Hypertext links', p. 152.

production, the Author and the Book.[27] In order to examine the ways in which digital texts challenge literary conventions, and promote collaboration and interactivity, academic, Espen Aarseth looks to the work of literary theorists Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes.[28] Both Barthes and Kristeva do not refer explicitly to hypertextual works but they offer some important notions that are drawn upon by hypertext theory.

In his influential essay 'Death of the Author', Barthes refutes the notion of the author as an omniscient, unified subject whose skill and authority creates a Book possessing a single interpretation. Instead, Barthes argues against the incorporation of biographical information and the "intentions" of the "author" - a subject who is historically constituted – in critical examinations of texts. Barthes claims "The writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings ... in such a way as never to rest on any of them".[29] Furthermore, Barthes categorises texts as readerly and writerly. Barthes describes the readerly text as static, linear, homogeneous and representative of dominant discourse.[30] Conversely, his notion of the writerly text is one where the reader is invited to assist in constructing meanings.[31] The writerly text is mobile, multiplicitous, heterogeneous and questioning of traditional narratives.[32] Hypertext possesses the potential to liberate works from the constraints of the readerly text in order to construct writerly texts.

Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextuality that arose out of her work on Bakhtin's construction of language as dialogic is another post-structuralist theory that hypertext embodies.[33] Kristeva argues that texts are not original or unique as they draw upon references from other texts. Also, according to Kristeva, readings of a text are informed by other texts consumed by the reader and his/her cultural situatedness. Texts are, after all, constructed within cultural systems. Kristeva writes that "each

---

[27] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', *Image, Music, Text*, Trans. Stephen Heath, (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 142-148; Roland Barthes, *S/Z*; Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); and, Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue, and the Novel' in *The Kristeva Reader* edited by Toril Moi, pp. 35-61, (New York: Colombia University Press, 1986).

[28] Espen J. Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997).

[29] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 146.

[30] Ibid, p. 244.

[31] Ibid, pp.246-250.

[32] Ibid.

word (text) is an intersection of words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read ... any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations: any text is the absorption and transformation of another".[34] Hypertext physically enables this idea of intertextuality as a "mosaic" of texts are able to be linked rendering the mental connections that Kristeva writes about visible in texts that are continually written by the reader and author.

Aarseth argues that readers of conventional print works consume texts through processes of cognition whereas the reader/interactor of the cybertext investigate it through ergodic effort.[35] *Ergodic* is appropriated from the Greek words *ergon* (work) and *hodos* (path).[36] Aarseth's notion of the ergodic text refers chiefly to cybertexts that are non-linear, multivocal and require at least some effort (work) from the reader who is able to follow many paths (hodos) and become a reader/interactor as s/he forges her/his own pathways through the hyperfiction. For Aarseth these efforts are nontrivial requiring engagements with the hypertext document being examined. Like Barthes' readerly and writerly texts, Aarseth posits that some works encourage the reader to be a voyeur while cybertexts demand that the "reader" plays an active and imaginative role in the narrative.[37] This process literally enacts Kristeva's notion of intertextuality in which the text is constructed by the reader's explorations of intersections of meanings. Aarseth writes:

> The cybertext reader ... is not safe ... The effort and energy demanded by the cybertext of its reader raise the stakes of interpretation to those of intervention. Trying to know a cybertext is an investment of personal improvisation that can result in either intimacy or failure ...it *is* possible to explore, get lost, and discover secret paths in theses texts, not metaphorically, but through the topological structures of the textual machinery.[38]

To Aarseth, the boundaries that traditionally mark the positons of reader, text, and author are challenged by the nonlinear and hypertextual qualities of cybertexts that encourage interactions between reader/viewers and the hypermedia work.

---

[33] Kristeva, *Desire in Language;* Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue, and the Novel' pp. 35-61.

[34] Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue, and the Novel', p. 37.

[35] Aarseth, *Cybertext,* pp. 1-3.

[36] Ibid, p. 1.

[37] Ibid, pp. 1-5. See also N. Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines,* (Cambridge, Mass., London: MIT Press, 2002).

Within cybercultural and hypertext theory it has become a commonplace to argue that Deleuze and Guattarri's description of the rhizome is applicable to hypertextual works.[39] The rhizome is an apt figure for attempting to unpack the characteristics and workings of hypertext. Deleuze and Guattarri's claim that the rhizome is "a short-term memory, or antimemory" speaks of the constantly changing cyber-environment in which reader/interactors focus upon specific lexias in transitory movements through cyber-texts.[40]

Hypertext is rhizomatic in that it has "multiple entryways and exits".[41] Structurally, hypertext is non-linear, forging networks and connections between chunks of information that are often diverse. Hypertexts are formed through the linking of chunks of information. Links are either text, graphics or designs that are highlighted or marked in a particular way. Clicking on these links transports the viewer/user to a new page complete with different links that may lead to the next page in the narrative or to narratives and/or images outside the document currently being viewed. This anarchic, as opposed to hierarchical, connectivity often makes transitory alliances that rupture notions of distinct texts, genres and media. Thus, hypertext employs a system of intertextuality that goes beyond the intertextual limitations of hard copy print texts. From this disloyalty to any one genre or medium, hypertext refuses the domination of one voice, preferring instead the many voices derived from the reading paths of the reader/interactor that coalesce around the particular of the present lexia.

Another feature of hypertext lies in the importance of the ruptures and gaps as well as the links and connections. In a similar vein to Deleuze and Guattarri's notion of nomadic space which utilizes the "principle of asignifying rupture" hypertext advocates disruption and discontinuity.[42] Deleuze and Guattarri describe nomadic space as "without property, enclosure or measure. Here there is no longer a division of

---

[38] Aarseth, *Cybertext,* p. 4.

[39] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateuas Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 21.

[40] Ibid. p. 21.

[41] George Landow, *Hypertext 2.0: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology,* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, [1992], 1997), p. 6.

[42] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateuas,* p. 9.

that which is distributed but rather a division among those who distribute themselves in an open space ... without precise limits."[43] Thus, the qualities of hypertext are closer to the multiplicitous rhizome than the Platonic vision of one source which hierarchizes the world. As George Landow writes, "Perhaps then hypertext and hypermedia represent the expression of the rhizome in the social space of writing".[44]

In the early twenty-first century, hypertext works appear to be proliferating on the World Wide Web and in forms such the CD ROM and DVD. These works tend to be projects based on collaboration amongst a range of multimedia workers such as writers, designers, musicians and graphic artists. Hypermedia texts also tend to remediate from one form to another often incorporating print, film, music, animation and written text. Critic and hypermedia author Robert Coover claims that hypertext is rapidly

> ... becoming the dominant expressive medium ... Hypertext and hypermedia will impact even print texts, not only altering the way they get written, but also the way they get published and distributed. Print books will have on-line versions enhanced by hypertextual and hypermedia elements. So if readers wish, they will be able to move from the text version of the book toward the Net version, which will have electronic materials unavailable in the print version.[45]

In 1990 one of the pioneers of hypertext, academic and writer, George Landow and his colleagues began using the software package Eastgate System's Storyspace. This hypertext authoring software was developed by hypermedia authors and academics Jay David Bolter, John B. Smith and Michael Joyce, and is currently marketed by Eastgate Systems Inc.[46] It enables authors to create, write, share with and link to other writers and readers. Landow's descriptions of Storyspace emphasize the

---

[43] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, (London: The Athlone Press, [1994] 1997).

[44] George P. Landow, *Hypertext 2.0*, p. 41.

[45] Larry McCaffery, 'As guilty as the rest of them: An interview with Robert Coover', *Critique*, Washington: Fall 2000, Vol. 42, Iss 1, pp. 115-127, available at http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=62817415&sid=1&Fmt=3&clientId=20931&RQT=309&VName=PQD, p. 5 of 7, date accessed 7/8/05.

[46] Christopher Keep, Tim McLaughlin, Robin Parmar, 'Storyspace', *The Electronic Labyrinth*, 1993-2000, available at http://www3.iath.virginia.edu/elab/hfl0023.html

ease and accessibility of the program.[47] According to Landow these characteristics enable users to construct their own, often complex, hypertextual texts.[48]

As a result of the popularity and effectiveness of their hypermedia construction tool, Eastgate now has an extensive catalogue of Storyspace constructions as well as a reputation for promoting cutting edge hypertexts through their web pages. The selection of hypertext fiction includes texts that have become iconic like Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*, Michael Joyce's *Afternoon, A story* and Stuart Moulthrop's *Victory Garden*.[49]

The issues of reader interactivity and the role of the author in hypertexts, signalled as important areas of investigation by hypertext theorists, are played out in the early work of important hyperfiction authors. One of these early pioneers is Carolyn Guyer. Her hyperfiction *Quibbling*[50] is constructed through the Storyspace reader that contains the immediate story within a single scrollable page but also permits the exploration of the hypertext structure. The hyperfiction centres around the interactions of four couples, as well as a number of other people such as some characters in a novel that one of the hypertext's characters is writing. In contrast to Joyce's *Afternoon*, where a single and shocking event drives the narrative, *Quibbling* unfolds from the echoes of similar narratives that thread through the hyperfiction. Guyer explains her variation from conventional narrative and structure by stating that "It (*Quibbling*) is hardly about anything itself, being more like the gossip, family discussions, letter, passing fancies and daydreams that we tell ourselves every day in order to make sense

---

47 George Landow, 'Is this hypertext any good? Evaluating quality in hypermedia', *Brown University Web site*, 3/04, available at http://www.brown.edu/Research/dichtung-digital/2004/3/Landow/index.htm, date accessed 3/12/05.

48 Ibid.

49 Jackson. *Patchwork Girl*. Storyspace, Eastgate Systems, 1995; Michael Joyce, *Afternoon: A Story*. Environment; Storyspace. Cambridge, Mass: Eastgate Systems, 1995; and, Stuart Moulthrop, *Victory Garden*. Environment: Storyspace. Cambridge, Mass: Eastgate Systems, 1995.

Alongside these hypertext classics, Eastgate stocks more recent works such as Richard Holeton's *Figurski at Findhorn on Acid*, Wes Chapman's *Turning In*, and Michael Joyce's *Moral Tales and Meditations*

50 Carolyn Guyer, *Quibbling*. .Eastgate Systems, Inc., USA, 1992.

of things. These are not exactly like myths, or fairy tales, or literary fiction. They are instead the quotidian stream."[51]

Critic Alison Sainsbury argues that *Quibbling* is a digital example of Hélène Cixous' notion of écriture féminine.[52] George Landow extends Sainsbury's specific reference to *Quibbling* as écriture féminine to hypertext in general. Landow ponders whether all hypertext is a type of feminist writing: "the electronic embodiment of that l'ecriture feminine for which Hélène Cixous called several decades ago."[53] Carolyn Guyer posits that the collectively participatory, non-hierarchical and rhizomatic qualities of hypertext work indicate a uniquely feminine form of writing based in a maternal context.[54] This notion of hypertext as a type of women's writing is foregrounded in Guyer's hyperfiction projects, *Mother Millennia*, a collection of stories of motherhood, *Sister Stories*, narratives of women as outsiders, *HiPitched Voices*, a women's hypertext collective, and, of course, *Quibbling*.[55] Guyer sums up her notion of hypertext as typical of women's writing derived from a maternal nurturance by stating "*We* know that being denied personal authority inclines us to prefer ... decentred contexts, and *we* have learned, especially from our mothers, that the woven practice of women's intuitive attention and reasoned care is a fuller, more balanced process than simple rational linearity (emphasis added)".[56]

In this essentialist narrative I wonder who is the "we", mentioned in the previous quote, who is authoritatively addressing the reader. This voice privileges a

---

51 Guyer, 'Something About Quibbling', *Leonardo*, October 1992, p. 258.

52 Alison Sainsbury, Review of Quibbling, 'Quibbling', Eastgate Systems, Inc, available at http://www.eastgate.com/catalog/Quibbling.html, date accessed 9/10/07. In her 1975 essay 'The Laugh of the Medusa', Helene Cixous discussed a way of writing that literally embodied the feminine. Helene Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* I (1976), pp. 875-893.

53 Landow, *Hypertext 2.0*, p. 206.

54 Carolyn Guyer cited in Sarah Sloane, *Digital Fictions: Storytelling in a Material World*, (Stamford, Connecticutt: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2000), p. 136.

55 Carolyn Guyer (editor, coordinator), *Mother Millennia*, available at http://www.mothermillennia.org/, date accessed 4/5/2002. Carolyn Guyer, *Sister Stories*, published by NYU Press available at http://www.nyupress.org/sisterstories/, date accessed 6/7/07. *HiPitched Voices* was a collective of women writers 1993 – 1994) who contributed work ranging over a variety of topics to a MOO, *Hypertext Hotel*. The collective did not survive the rapid expansion of the World Wide Web from 1994 onwards. (See Carolyn Guyer, 'Fretwork Notes', available at http://www.mothermillennia.org/Carolyn/Fretwork_Notes.html, date accessed 3/5/07.)

56 Guyer quoted in Landow, *Hypertext 2.0*, Landow, p.206, emphasis added.

conventional femininity of intuition, nurturing, care and hegemonic maternity. At the heart of this traditional femininity Guyer places the mother – epitome, vessel and perpetrator of everything hegemonically female. Guyer's association of conventional femininity and maternity with hypertext overlooks the chaotic potential of hypertextual writings to challenge and subvert all kinds of dominant narratives and norms.

While Guyer posits that her hyperfiction and hypertext in general is basically an electronic version of Cixous' l'écriture féminine, feminist critic and hypertext writer, Diane Greco contests this position.[57] Greco disputes arguments that attempt to define any form of writing, such as hypertext, as embodying uniquely feminine characteristics. She challenges Guyer's standpoint by turning to the work of other female hypermedia writers that reject the notion of hypertext as a particularly feminine form of writing which "embraces an ethic of care that is essentially intuitive, complicated, detailed, but also 'fuller' and 'balanced'".[58] Greco argues that "some notable hypertexts by women, such as Kathryn Cramer's *In Small and Large Pieces* and Jane Yellowlees Douglas's *I Have Said Nothing*, feature violence, rupture, and breakage as organising imagery".[59]

Alongside Diane Greco, I reject any special claims concerning hypertext being a quintessentially feminine or feminist mode of writing. Guyer's linking of hypertext's qualities (permeable boundaries, multiplicity, non-linearity, and potential for collaborative and democratic interaction) with characteristics she claims as specifically feminine (intuition, nurturing, caring, centring on family) restricts the possibilities of both femininity and hypertextual works. The standpoint reinstates a traditional femininity that contains rather than liberates feminine bodies from dominant discourses. Guyer's argument also limits the creative and political potential of hypertext. As well as the female artists, Kathryn Cramer and Jane Yellowless Douglas, mentioned by Greco, whose hypertexts do not fit Guyer's stereotypical feminine hypertext construction, there are male hyperfiction writers, for example Michael Joyce and Tim McLaughlin, who produce work that could be classified as "feminine" hypertext. Joyce creates hyperfictions that deal with themes of home and

---

[57] Diane Greco quoted in Landow, *Hypertext 2.0*, p 206.

[58] Ibid, p. 206.

[59] Ibid, p. 206.

family while McLaughlin constructs hypertexts considering internal and external journeys. Their hyperfictions are critically acclaimed as "lyrical" and "elegiac".[60]

I argue that hypertext is not specifically feminine or feminist but this digital medium is enabling for various feminist projects. Interacting with and constructing hypertexts encourages awareness of the multiplicity of subject positions and the notion of the decentred self. Hypertext's multiplicity, non-hierarchical linking and non-linearity provide the basis for the critique of dominant discourses, for example, conventional binaries and the unified self. The connectivity of hypertext reveals the falsity of the public/private binary as it links the personal to the political in a vast array of Web pages like *Hip Mama.* This linking of personal and political threads is clearly promoted by the growing number of feminist activist websites, forums, and email lists. Hypertext promotes rapid linking and dissemination of information and resources at local, national and international levels. Activism is also an active force in the work of cyberartists and cyberfeminists like VNS Matrix, Riot Grrrls, and Geekgirls who use the associative, visual and lateral qualities of hypertext to create dynamic feminist texts.[61] In general, hypertext offers potential solutions to the problems entailed in acknowledging diversity and multiple positions while also permitting subjects to rally around specific issues to enable a cyberfeminism of hybridity, creativity and political action. The enormous possibilities for feminist projects to make use of hypertext and the form of hyperfiction are still being explored as multimedia artists like Shelly Jackson play with new technologies.

In company with Diane Greco's arguments, Shelley Jackson's views on feminist writings and hyperfictions offer a more postmodern take on Guyer's essentialist position regarding women creating hypertexts. Jackson states that

> I'm a feminist writer, emphasis on writer. Those two things aren't at odds, of course. Hypertext has certain built in possibilities (multilinearity, multiple focii, fuzzy boundaries, inclusiveness, collaboration) ... that have traditionally been associated with femininity, though they're also

---

[60] 'Hypertext Resources', *Eastgate Systems, Inc.*, available at http://www.eastgate.com/hypertext/Criticism.html, date accessed 2/7/08.

[61] See the following examples of cyberfeminist artists and activists: Virginia Barratt, Julianne Pierce, Francesca de Rimini, Josephine Starrs, 'Brave New Girls', *VNS Matrix*, available at http://lx.sysx.org/vnsmatrix.html, date accessed 5/7/08; *Riot Grrrl Online*, available at http://www.hot-topic.org/riotgrrrl/, date accessed 5/7/08; and, Rosie X, *GeekGirl,* available at http://www.geekgirl.com.au/blog/, date accessed 5/7/08.

> characteristic of a strain of writing – strongest in modernist and postmodern works of ... last century – produced by both sexes.[62]

While Jackson acknowledges a feminist influence permeating the ways in which she approaches her projects, it is a feminism that eschews obvious messages and pedantic rhetoric. Her aesthetic flickers around playing with the hypertextual moment in a poetics of theory, canon and popular culture. Jackson writes: "Feminism, early on, gave rise to some tediously earnest prose; the politically engaged often mistrust showy and playful work. (Angela) Carter demonstrated that acrobatics and ideas go together very well."[63]

As a digital bricoleur[64], Shelley Jackson energetically rounds up elements of literary and feminist theory, "classic" texts, references to popular culture and, mindful of humorous possibilities, scatters them throughout her work. In its mobilization of a Gothic sensibility, its utilization of the qualities of hypertext, and its remediation of print technologies Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* is an irreverent and innovative, subversive and playful text that is now firmly entrenched in the current canon of hypertext writings.

(Mary)Shelley Jackson's Patchwork Girl - In the Flesh

The inspiration for *Patchwork Girl* flowed from Shelley Jackson's desires to explore the possibilities of hypertext. The piecemeal monster was born from sketches in her notebook of a naked female body fragmented by scars in the form of dotted lines.

---

[62] Shelley Jackson quoted in a conversation with Jennifer Ley, 'Women and Technology, Beyond the Binary A Roundtable Discussion with N. Katherine Hayles, Marjorie Perloff, Diane Greco, Linda Carroli and Shelly Jackson, ', *Riding the Meridian*, available at http://www.heelstone.com/meridian/rtable3.html p. 9.

[63] Shelley Jackson quoted in Rosita, Nunes, 'Written on (and under) the skin: an interview with Shelley Jackson', *Tattoo Highway*, available at http://www.tattohighway.org/8/sjinterview.html

[64] "Bricoleur" is "A term introduced by Levi-Strauss (1962) describing a type of thinking and symbolization; the opposite of 'engineer'. The engineer creates specialized tools for specialized purposes. The bricoleur is a 'jack-of-all-trades', who uses few, non-specialized tools for a wide variety of purposes." *The Dictionary of Anthropology, AnthroBase.com*, available at http://www.anthrobase.com/Dic/eng/def/bricoleur.htm.

According to Jackson, these doodlings occurred during lectures by George Landow on hypertext and literary theory.[65] Jackson states:

> My patchworked girl monster emerged ... as a metaphor for a fragmented and dispossessed text that nevertheless had a loud, triumphant voice ...I wanted to write about the liberating potential of that unseatedness, that lack of clear boundaries or a native ground. The stitched-together monster is an easy metaphor for any text, but especially hypertext, as the still uneasy offspring of a new technology and an old one: books, literature.[66]

In its current form, *Patchwork Girl* is a text that is considerable in size and varied in content. In the work, 323 lexias are connected by 462 links that open up a diversity of ways through the text.[67] These lexias vary in length from passages of over 300 words to just one sentence. As an "early" hypertext fiction (1995), *Patchwork Girl* displays qualities characteristic of this period such as a strong reliance on intertextuality and a self-reflexive engagement with the medium itself. The narrative is fabricated from Jackson's own prose as well as passages from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, L. Frank Baum's *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*, Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*, Barbara Maria Stafford's *Body Criticism*, and Jacques Derrida's *Disseminations*.[68] Excerpts from these texts are often used without obvious referencing (bibliographic details of the sources are recorded in separate sections headed "notes"). These sources of theory and story are continually interwoven into a patchworked assemblage of monstrous body parts and narratives.

In a similar vein to the majority of hypertext fictions, *Patchwork Girl* does not possess a linear narrative with a discrete beginning and certain ending. Jackson writes that "My mind doesn't travel in a straight line, and neither do my stories. I like

---

[65] Shelley Jackson quoted in Mark Amerika, 'Stitch Bitch: The Hypertext Author as Cyborg-Femme Narrator', *Amerika On-Line* #7, 15/03/98, available at http://www.heise.de/tp/english/inhalt/kolu/3193/1.html

[66] Jackson quoted in Amerika, 'Stitch Bitch: The Hypertext Author'.

[67] In hypertext the reliance upon lexias linked to other lexias fragments the text while releasing the lexia from a dependence on whatever preeceeds or follows. Landow, *Hypertext 2.0*, p. 64.

[68] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*; Frank L. Baum, *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985); Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century' in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, pp. 149-181, (New York: Routledge, 1991); Barbara Stafford, *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine*, (Cambridge, Mass, MIT Press, 1991); and Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, translated by Barbara Johnson, (Chicago: University Press, 1981).

digression and interruption and the clash of styles and voices ...". [69] *Patchwork Girl,* however, does make use of conventional print narrative techniques such as employing settings, characters, sequenced storyline, and characters' point of view. The deployment of print techniques in combination with Jackson's clever humour, lyrical writing style and bricolage have evoked a variety of affective responses from me as a reader/interactor with this hypertext fiction. As well as engaging with the intellectual aspects such as the self-reflexivity and theory that shape and sustain Jackson' work, I have been emotionally moved by the plight of the monster. Jackson's piecing together of patchworks of intellectual and emotional concerns in the text has opened up space for me to respond with great humour, sadness, anger, curiosity, and anticipation. The text is woven through with comic moments, abject attraction, pathos, and erotic tension.

Shelley Jackson makes use of a visual navigation structure, images and a variety of levels in the text. *Patchwork Girl* requires the "reader" to literally connect the different lexias that make up the body of the female monster. On the first screen Patchwork Girl is depicted naked with her arms outstretched, hands upturned, and eyes closed (Figure 12, p 167). The black and white picture of the monster depicts her piecemeal composition visually by dissecting the image of the body with dotted lines (*graveyard/body*) (Figure 13).[70] Parts of this image "pop up" as the reader/interactor

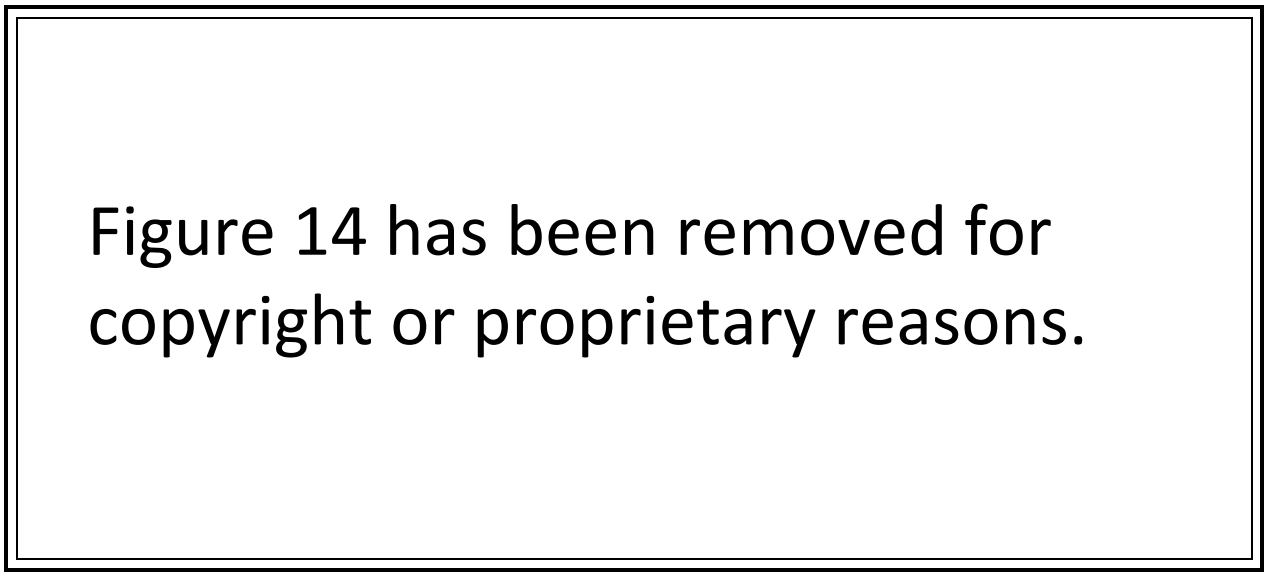
Figure 13: Piecemeal

---

[69] Jackson quoted in Megan Lynch, 'A Conversation with Shelley Jackson', available at http://www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0402/jackson/interview.html accessed 20/6/02.

[70] When referencing passages from *Patchwork Girl* I refer to five divisions –*a graveyard, a journal, a quilt* (which becomes *crazy quilt* after clicking on the link) *a story*, and *broken accents*. These divisions link to text I call subdivisions which, break down into parts and then segments of the story. For example, a quote from Patchwork Girl about her scars would be referenced as follows – *story/severance/join.*

Figure 13: Piecemeal, sourced from Jackson. *Patchwork Girl.*



Shelley Jackson. Patchwork Girl.
Environment: Storyspace. Cambridge,
Mass: Eastgate Systems, 1995.

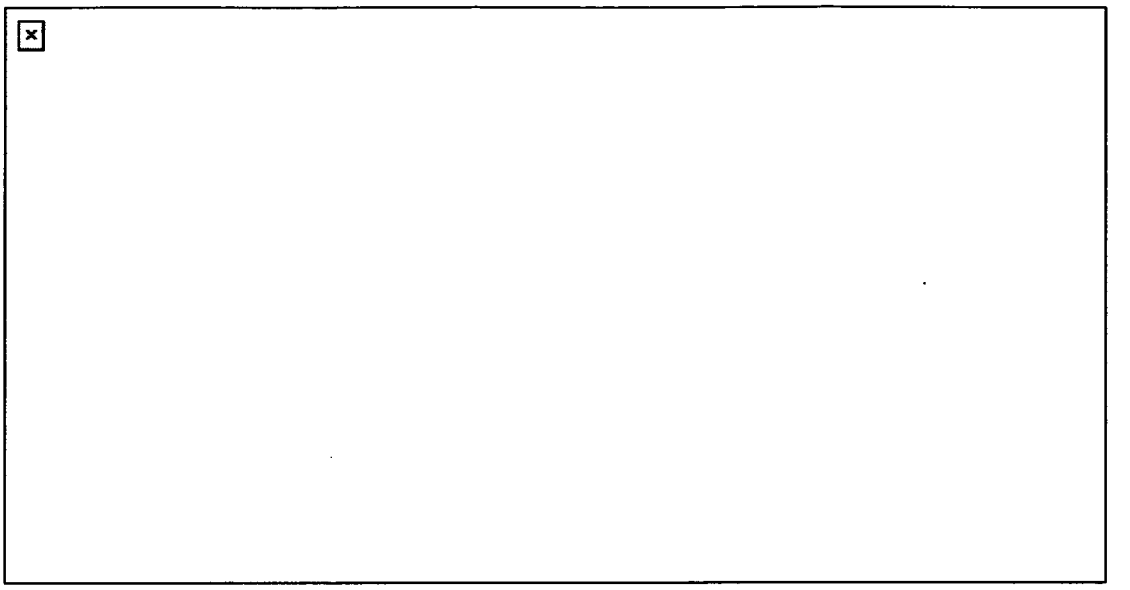


Figure 14: Structure

navigates his/her way through the hypertext. From the frontispiece of dissected Patchwork Girl, the viewer/user links to the title page which proclaims

Patchwork Girl
Or a modern monster
By Mary / Shelley, & Herself.

A graveyard
A journal
A quilt
A story
& broken accents

The stories that literally make up Patchwork Girl are told in this multi-levelled work by links from the title page to five divisions: *a graveyard, a journal, a quilt, a story,* and *broken accents* (Figure 14)[71]. These five divisions can be accessed by either clicking on the textual links listed on the title page or by clicking on the Patchwork Girl graphic. Clicking on the links to the divisions *a graveyard, story, quilt* – the title of this division changes to *crazy quilt* - and *journal* leads immediately to four different images of Patchwork Girl's naked body titled *hercut*, and *hercut 2*, *hercut 3*, and *hercut 4*. The graphics depict Patchwork Girl's body as dissected and the parts are

[71] Figure 13: Structure, sourced from Jackson. *Patchwork Girl.*

jumbled. These images link directly to the first four divisions as listed on the title page. The fifth link on the title page, *Broken accents* enables the viewer/user to click-link to a side section of a human brain titled *Phrenology* which, in turn, links to the *body of text*. The five divisions each break down into smaller divisions that, for clarity of terminology, I call 'subdivisions' which, in turn, branch into smaller 'parts'. At the end of all of this breaking down is the component of text that I term the 'segment'. Jackson links these divisions, subdivisions, parts and segments in webs of interconnectivities that produce a deceptively simple hyperfiction with subtle outcomes.

Patchwork Girl is made up of body parts salvaged from the text's *graveyard* (a division with nine further subdivisions). From the *graveyard* Jackson resurrects the following body parts: left leg, left arm (with graphic), lips, trunk, tongue, teeth, eyeballs, ears, nose, hands, left breast, right arm, right leg (graphic), foot, liver, stomach, lung, veins, and guts. If clicked on, these lexias relate some of the history of that appendage. For instance, the reader/interactor is able to link to the upper right arm of Tristessa who had a "deadly arm with a bottle" (*upper right arm*) and then link on to the lower right arm of Eleanor – " a lady very dextrous with the accoutrements of femininity" (*lower right arm*). Linking to the lexia describing the left breast, the reader/interactor discovers that this body part once belonged to a breastfeeding mother who "squirted the extra milk on her dying babies ... (and) filled a quill - pen – at her nipple and wrote invisible letters to her dead babies" (*left breast*). This is an example of the deep enmeshment of maternal flesh and writing throughout the hypertext. The random linking of body parts that occurs as the reader/interactor hypertexts around the graveyard section builds a textual picture (as well as the two graphics) of the piecemeal body of Patchwork Girl.

A journal writes fragments of narrative in the voice of Mary Shelley. This division is composed of the subdivisions *my walk, written, sewn, appetite, crave, infant*, and *scars* which also contain numerous parts. Just as the creature in *Frankenstein* initially looks to his creator for nurturing and support, Patchwork Girl seeks out her "mother" (*my walk*). While Frankenstein is overcome with horror at the sight of his monstrous creation, abandoning the creature, the character Mary Shelley looks favourably on Patchwork Girl. Shelley eventually expresses a queer maternal desire for her creation. From *a journal* the reader/interactor is able to link to the *scars* subdivision. In this part

of the hyperfiction the erotic tensions between Mary Shelley and Patchwork Girl are made explicit.

The division *a story* is physically accessed from the title page or the main graphic of *Patchwork Girl*. It takes up the description of the female creature in story fragments that run alongside those narratives from *a journal*. Six subdivisions form *a story*: *M/S, severance, seagoing, séance, falling apart*, and *rethinking*. While the stories of *a journal* were told in Mary Shelley's voice, the division *a story* allows Patchwork Girl to tell part of her tale. For instance, in the *M/S* subdivision within the division *a story,* Patchwork Girl describes herself:

> I am tall, and broad-shouldered enough that many take me for a man, others think me a transsexual ...My black hair falls down my back but does not make me girlish. Women and men alike mistake my gender and both are drawn to me ...
>
> I move swiftly with long loose strides; I was never comfortable in the drawing rooms or the pruned and cherished gardens of Mary's time and territory ... I was made as strong as my unfortunate and famous brother, but less neurotic.

In *a story*, the female monster tells her story of the sea voyage after parting from Mary Shelley. Patchwork Girl also relates her complicity with a fraudulent medium, Madame Q, as well as her affairs with Chancy, a woman cross-dressing as a male sailor, and a man who possessed an artificial tail which enabled him to join a circus and be exhibited as a freak. In *more partings,* a part of *falling apart,,* Patchwork Girl details how her 173 year old body is breaking down and apart. After her hand drops off in a supermarket and her ear in WalMart, Patchwork Girl states:

> When I bathed, I sat in the steaming fragrant bathwater amidst the warm muddy bodies of my vagrant parts. They seemed companionable, they seemed to have personalities of a rudimentary sort like small agreeable dogs. I would ... lie back in the warm water and they would nestle about and on me.

She details how her multiplicity is finally unravelling. Alongside the graphic and playful descriptions of flesh, Patchwork Girl talks of language as "a haunting, possession, an unfamiliar voice, dogs growling, in my throat" (*story/rethinking/language/voices*). Another lexia in the *rethinking* subdivision enables reader/interactors to mentally, if not physically, link to Mary Shelley as Patchwork

Girl wonders whether the patch of skin from Mary that is sewn onto her own body has in some way inspired her career as a writer. Patchwork Girl writes:

> Is my gift a cutting of hers ... Maybe my crude strength and my techy bent are better filters for her voice than her still-polite manners. Or does her politesse make her criminal leanings steeper, more vertiginous for the height of their drawing room origins? Like a meathook hung over the spinet.
>
> Mary writes, I write, we write, but who is really writing? Ghost writers are the only kind there really are. (*story/rethinking/Am I Mary*).

By clicking on the *broken accents* link, the reader/interactor summons the graphic of a side section of a human head depicted in a similar way to anatomical models of the brain. Instead of being labelled with medical terms, the various parts of the brain receive other titles including *Mary, Bronwyn, swarm, fog, embryo*, and *hopscotch.* This subdivision is titled *phrenology* and it links directly to another subdivision *body of text.* For example, the reader/interactor clicks on the brain graphic titled *Mary* which links to the text *lexia* in the subdivision *body of text.* So, Jackson turns around postmodern notions of the body being written upon or inscribed to demonstrate that text is accessible only through (a)/the body. This materializes metaphors concerning the text as a body and/or the main part of a work, as opposed to the introduction or conclusion, being known as the body of the text. N. Katherine Hayles argues that *Patchwork Girl*'s accessing of text through the body challenges the conventional notion tied to print works that perceives the mind as the instigator whose imagination discovers images in the text.[72] Hayles writes that in this form of linking from bodily graphic to written text " the body is figured not as the *product* of the immaterial work but a *portal* to it, thus inverting the usual hierarchy that puts mind first."[73] *Body of text* is made up of thirty-six different parts that tell the story of Patchwork Girl in contemporary America where she is on a road trip with her lap top computer as she writes her way around the country. This subdivision deals with multiplicity in terms of identity and the writing process (*body of text/double agent/blood*); monstrous flesh (*body of text/dispersed/mementos*); and, the permeability of boundaries (*body of text/dotted line/ resurrection*).

---

[72] N. Katherine Hayles, 'Flickering Connectivities in Shelley Jackson's Patchwork Girl: The Importance of Media-Specific Analysis', 2000, available at http://www3.iath.virginia.edu/pmc/text-only/issue.100/10.2hayles.txt.

[73] Hayles, 'Flickering Connectivities'.

Yet another division of *Patchwork Girl, quilt/crazy quilt*, is the most visually ordered section of the text. Thirty subdivisions are set out in rows. The borders of these subdivisions are coloured blue, pink, yellow, red, green or black. Linking is done through a visually downward movement. In contrast to this order, however, it is this section in which a variety of texts are drawn upon to form connections of collaborative writings. For instance, Frank L. Baum's *Patchwork Girl of Oz*, Barbara Maria Stafford's *Body Criticism: Imagining the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine,* and *Getting Started with Storyspace* are patched together in the subdivision *seam'd.*[74] In *seam'd* Jackson takes lines from the *Storyspace, Body Criticism* and *Patchwork Girl of Oz* in that order in the following:

> You may emphasize the presence of text links by using a special style color or typeface. Or, if you prefer, you can leave needles sticking in the wounds – in the manner of tailors – with thread wrapped around them. Being seam'd with scars was both a fact of eighteenth century life and a metaphor for dissonant interferences ruining any finely adjusted composition. "The charm you need is a needle and thread," said the Shaggy Man.

While this division reads in a relatively smooth way, Jackson emphasizes the seams and scars of the work rather than attempting to craft a seamless blend of diverse material.

Within this economy of diversity, Jackson is interested in interrogating the commonalities and differences between components of text. Most of the patching together of ideas and flesh is done by reader/interactors across divisions, subdivisions, parts and segments rather than within chunks of text. Connections are formed by physically clicking on links and also through associations of ideas and images.

Upon mapping the structure of *Patchwork Girl* she stands before us – a hybrid and monstrous creature. Her body parts are sutured together to form a monster whose flesh breaks apart along scar lines like the links and spaces in hypertext that connect and separate narratives. With all of these strands hypertextually linked, *Patchwork Girl* is threaded through with maternal energies and flesh that laugh at dominant discourses of motherhood. Within the domain of the text, maternity is constructed as hybridity,

---

[74] Baum, *The Patchwork Girl of Oz;* Stafford, *Body Criticism;* and, Mark Bernstein, Jay David Bolter, Michael Joyce, John B Smith, *Getting Started with Storyspace, Eastgate Systems, Inc*, available at http://www.eastgate.com/storyspace/DownloadWin.html, date accessed 9/8/08.

monstrosity, fragmented identity and queer desire. Let me explore the ways in which this monstrous maternity is constructed in the multileveled topologies of *Patchwork Girl.*

Patchy Navigations and Techno-Needlework

Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* is a work composed of text, images and materiality that demonstrates the potential multiplicity and hybridity of hypertext fiction. In *Patchwork Girl* Jackson reclaims the metaphor of author giving birth to the text from masculinist attempts to appropriate female powers of reproduction. This reclamation is evident at the level of authorship and story as well as in the utilization of the qualities of hypertext. Female authors Shelley Jackson and (character) Mary Shelley write about "birthing" Patchwork Girl. The metaphor of giving birth to text is also present in the headings of various subdivisions like *birth* and *conception* (*crazy quilt/conception*). Jackson's utilization of the capabilities of hypertext enables a visual and material 'birth' of the fractured monster Patchwork Girl mobilizing the metaphor of a creative cybermaternity.

Patchwork Girl displays some of the characteristics of 1990s' hypertexts such as self-reflexivity and intertextuality. It also operates in a slightly different way to other early canonical hyperfictions. Many of these early hypertexts such as *Afternoon* and *Victory Garden* are innovative texts but their straightforward use of visual devices such as graphics/text/links does not permit the utilization of the full potential of this medium.

In contrast to her hypertext predecessors, *Patchwork Girl* plays with and develops the capabilities of hypertext fiction in order to produce her multimedia work. Visual devices utilized in *Patchwork Girl* are integral to and integrated within the hypertext – they inform and inflect the narrative. The clever integration of these devices in *Patchwork Girl* stands in contrast to their less developed use in the texts of Moulthrop and Joyce. Perhaps this difference in the utilizations of visual materials and markers in hypertexts is a matter of occupation and preference. Shelley Jackson's more inventive use of the visual aspect of hypertext could be due to her background as an artist/designer/writer who has illustrated a children's book and designed web pages. In contrast to Jackson's familiarity with the visual element of books and hypertexts, the other pioneers of hypertext Joyce and Moulthrop are both established writers of print

and electronic text. Hypertext critic, Raine Koskimaa suggests that the concentration of writers like Joyce and Moulthrop on print-text rather than text-and-image is an act of boundary maintenance as they reinforce their position as creators of "serious hypertext" (the by-line of Eastgate Systems) in opposition to the computer "gamers" who are conventionally tied to "play" and popular culture.[75]

In order to negotiate pathways around *Patchwork Girl*'s chunks of text, the tool bar is the crucial element. It is comprised of a rectangle in which four arrows point up, down, left and right, and three dots are placed in the middle of these images. As well as these graphics, Jackson positions a question mark in the left corner, and a double headed arrow in the right corner of the rectangle. If the reader/interactor clicks on the arrow pointing to the top of the page s/he moves "up" one level and, clicking on the opposite arrow shifts the user "down" a level. Clicking on arrows to the "left" or "right" of the three dots shifts the reader/interactor one step to the left or right of the current lexia. Activating the three dot link enables the reader/interactor to move from reading text to accessing the overall map of the hypertexts of *Patchwork Girl,* and back to text again. The question mark icon when clicked on displays the links leading to and from the lexia being currently shown on screen. Default links are activated when the two-headed arrow button is touched.[76]

Unlike hypermedia creators such as Joyce and Moulthrop who use Storyspace for their work, Shelley Jackson gravitates towards a Web-like authoring system. Web based hypertext tend to use links that are comprised of only a few words in order to prevent the alteration of meaning attached to these links. In contrast to this conservation of words as links on the Web, hypertexts produced using Storyspace often use longer links comprised of a greater number of words. This lengthening of the links, sometimes to the size of a sentence, enables the connections between ideas to be clearly established. The invisibility of the links, in the Storyspace model, until the reader/interactor presses a combination of keys, assists this technique of increasing word limits for linkages. In *Patchwork Girl*, Jackson treads a path that is slightly different to both approaches. She tends to use phrases rather than words or sentences

---

[75] Raine Koskimaa, 'Visual Structuring of Hyperfiction Narratives', Hypertext Resources, *Eastgate Systems, Inc.*, available at http://www.altx.com/ebr/ebr6/6koskimaa/6koski.htm

[76] A default link occurs when the reader/interactor does not specify which link or pathway to be taken. For example, a default link in the hyperfiction *Patchwork Girl* would take the reader/interactor from the title page to *phrenology*.

to produce striking images or notions that often seize the reader/interactor's attention. For instance, Patchwork Girl's birth is described in terms of writing, sewing and laborious exertion. Mary Shelley (character) writes that she sewed until the stitches blurred together and also that she wrote until the black letters ran together (*a journal/sewn/written*). Thus, Jackson, in the mode of print conventions, relies upon the reader/interactor making mental links between ideas as well as physically linking by means of hypertext capabilities. In the passages describing Patchwork Girl's birth this combination of hypertext and associative linking extends the metaphor of author/creator "giving birth" from print to the cyber-realm.

Shelley Jackson skilfully utilizes the form and characteristics of hypertext in *Patchwork Girl* in order to tell a story of fragments, paradox and contradiction. She achieves this by ensuring that the different techno-patches of story are composed in ways that preserve their individual speaking voices while the author and reader/interactor stitch these diverse texts together to form a quilt of hybridity. This double movement of individuation and suturing is constructed and maintained by the variety of structural links that construct the hyper-project.[77] George Landow and academic Jason Williams describe these differing hyper-landscapes as "link topologies".[78] In discussion of the text Williams posits that the hypertext section that recounts Patchwork Girl's narrative (*a story*), as opposed to some of the other divisions, is built upon the notions of a progression of time and events as well as a coherent and everyday setting for the action that unfolds.[79] Williams writes that

> Because this section emphasizes temporal dynamics, its link structure correspondingly parallels our normal linear perception of time, regularly progressing from past lexias forward. Mary Shelley's encounter outdoors with the monster and the ambiguous bedroom scene behave similarly but take the peculiar cast of ancillary narratives, like apocryphal stories or appended myths – complete units that draw upon and support material from other units.[80]

---

[77] Jason Williams, 'Texture, Topology, Collage and Biology', *Literary Theory and Theorists in Shelley Jackson's Works, Patchwork Girl, Comments Etc*, English 112, (1996), available at http://scholars.nus.edu.sg/cpace/ht/pg/jwpatch.html, date accessed 2/2/2005. Landow, *Hypertext 2.0*, p. 201.

[78] Williams, 'Texture, Topology, Collage and Biology'. Landow, *Hypertext 2.0*, p. 201.

[79] Williams, 'Texture, Topology, Collage and Biology'.

[80] Ibid.

The different levels of Shelley Jackson's hypertext require the reader/interactor to not only negotiate the visual geography of the text but to also "sew" Patchwork Girl's various body parts together and "birth" the digital monster. For instance, in the division *crazy quilt* Jackson plays upon metaphors of stitching, sewing, quilting, surgery, eccentricity, and otherness. In his discussion of *Patchwork Girl* George Landow identifies this kind of hypertext narrative as "collage writing".[81] The chunks of text in this division form their own "crazy quilt" or "collage" of diverse stories and styles of writing. This collage or "crazy quilt" of different texts also functions at the level of the lexia. For instance, Jackson uses excerpts from a range of postmodern literary works, canonical and popular culture texts. From this diversity of sources, Jackson creates a narrative and visual design that *becomes* a crazy quilt of *Patchwork Girl*'s stories. The author mobilizes the qualities of hypertext to perform subjectivities which morph through entities such as text, reader/interactor, author and interface.

Another example of Shelley Jackson's hyperfiction hypertexting on many levels occurs in the *graveyard* division. There are the obvious links that the viewer clicks on in order to access the stories of the people whose body parts are used to construct Patchwork Girl. There are also two other hypertext narratives that work to produce a multiplicitous and protean text. These move from the particular to the general. On one hand, Jackson weaves elaborate and detailed histories of each of the inhabitants of the graveyard who are represented by their particular body part which Landow describes as a "Bakhtinian multivocality".[82] Hypertextually, these individual voices raised together by the exploring viewer construct a general narrative of the lived experiences of a diverse range of nineteenth-century women. For instance, Jackson tells us that the monster's left leg

> Belonged to Jane, a nanny who harbored under her durable grey dresses and sensible undergarments a remembrance of a less sensible time: a tattoo of a ship and the legend, Come Back to Me. Nanny knew some stories that astonished her charges, and though the ship on her thigh blurred and grew faint and blue with distance, until it seemed that the currents must have long ago finished their work, undoing its planks one by one with unfailing patience, she always took the children to the wharf when word came that a ship was docking, and many a sailor greeted her by name.

---

[81] Landow, *Hypertext, 2.0* pp. 198-199.

[82] Ibid, p. 200.

> My leg is always twitching, jumping, joggling. It wants to go places. It has had enough of waiting. (*graveyard/left leg*).

Patchwork Girl's lips are from Margaret who

> laughed so freely ... that the townspeople frowned on her ...
>
> My lips always get the joke. A little later so do I. (*graveyard/lips*)

The monster's hands "are a cabal": belonging to a thief, a seamstress, and a woman who wrote the books her husband put his name to "as well as dusted them" (*graveyard/hands*). And, the creature's intestines were once those of "Mistress Anne" who prided herself on her regularity. The monster's statuesque size required a longer digestive system so, producing interspecies monstrosity, a cow's intestine is added to Mistress Anne's body part. Unfortunately, the cow's intestine is as explosive as Mistress Anne's is regular and modest. The monster reports that Mistress Anne is greatly embarrassed by the repeated explosions of the digestive system to which she is now linked. Thus, body parts and even segments of this flesh are hypertexted by the author's digital construction of text and the reader/interactor's click linking. Collaboratively, Shelley Jackson, Mary Shelley, the monster and the reader/interactor birth the creature by selecting, clicking, reading and stitching together the parts of Patchwork Girl. Thus, hypertext enables reader/interactors, author/creator, Shelley Jackson and textual mother Mary Shelley to become cyber-maternal bodies in 'birthing" the hyperfiction.

Each body part, from a woman or several women, tells its own story and subjectivity. Jackson, however, expands this notion of multiplicity to argue that just like Patchwork Girl, all bodies are conglomerates of bits and parts. In the article 'Stitch Bitch: The Patchwork Girl' the author argues that "The body is a patchwork though the stitches might not show. It's run by committees, a loose aggregate of entities we can't really call human, but which have what look like lives of a sort".[83] Thus, Patchwork Girl becomes a broad metaphor for contemporary takes on identity as already fractured and multiple.

---

[83] Shelley Jackson, 'Stitch Bitch: The Patchwork Girl', *Paradoxa* 4, (1998): 526-538.

While *Patchwork Girl* skilfully uses the medium of hypertext it is not as experimental as other hypermedia works.[84] *Patchwork Girl* is not a text of infinite and nebulous intertwinings of nodes, links and stories. Instead, it is a hypertext that is carefully structured and laid out in lexias and narratives that are easily negotiated by reader/interactors. Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* is a series of lexias that provide the raw material for viewers to construct their own version of the story. Once a section is clicked on the reader/interactor is able to link to any division and/or lexia but the visual indications of links (arrows) show fairly linear pathways through the text. Even though the section *crazy quilt* hosts amalgamations of diverse literary sources, linking follows a fairly linear pathway, arrows directing the flow of narrative "down" the page. Thus, reader/interactor choice in Jackson's text is confined within the perameters of the author's text passages, images and linked pathways. Although reader/interactors meander through the divisions of the *graveyard, journal, quilt, story* and *broken accents*, there is a sense of progression through these areas as the story is built upon the scraps of text and images that the viewer/interactor links together. These fragments and threads are contextualised by the headings of the divisions, subdivisions, parts and segments. For example, the reader/interactor is not merely click-linking chunks of text, s/he is stitching together and eventually birthing the body of a female monster. Viewers are not just clicking on text boxes, they are exploring a graveyard or quilt or journal and building narratives from the evidence found. Therefore, the structure of the hyperfiction separates and contextualizes the voices of Patchwork Girl's parts while also revealing a composite picture of nineteenth century life.

Just as threads of nineteenth-century experiences form strong patterns in the hyperfiction, a key written text of this period, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, infiltrates *Patchwork Girl* in a number of ways. In the next section I outline *Frankenstein*'s storyline. From this tale of monstrous (re)production and parental abandonment I

---

[84] One such text is Linda Dement's CD ROM, *Cyberflesh Girlmonster Cyberflesh*, Australian Network for Art and Technology. Australian Film Commission. Novamedia, 1995 (1995). During Artists' Week of the Adelaide Festival 1994, approximately thirty women permitted Dement to scan various body parts. From these images, Dement created conglomerate monstrous bodies. The work is interactive to a certain degree as clicking on a monster randomly brings up other images, story, sound effects, or medical information. Without a menu or controllable interface, *Cyberflesh Girlmonster* is a text that continually escapes from the reader/interactor.

investigate strands of monstrosity that creep from the nineteenth-century tale and amble throughout the twentieth-century hyperfiction, *Patchwork Girl*.

Frankenstein – The Modern Prometheus

Mary Shelley's novel, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* is an iconic fiction whose influence reverberates from the time it was published in 1818 to the contemporary period of the early twenty-first century. *Frankenstein*'s continuing popularity in academic and mainstream media rests chiefly upon the broad appeal of the text's major concerns. These are existential issues that continually intrigue and provoke human inquiry into notions of reproduction, maternity, nature, science, technology, love and death.

For nearly two centuries Shelley's fictional scientist and his monster have been referred to, depicted and distorted in arenas such as film, literature, works of science fiction, comic books, and theatre as well as, more recently, current debates concerning medical ethics, reproductive technologies and cloning. In the mainstream press references to Frankenstein's monster often indicate a situation or issue that has mutated into one that is incredibly complex and fraught. Both popularized and specialized publications describe genetically altered foodstuffs, as for example, "Frankenfood".[85] The prevalence of the figure of the "mad scientist" in contemporary films and fictions also demonstrates the ubiquity and continued relevance of the Frankenstein archetype.[86]

Victor Frankenstein's immersion in his studies of physiology and anatomy leads to his discovery of a process that can bring dead flesh to life. He is inspired by this breakthrough to construct a human being from body parts and animate it. Frankenstein spends a great deal of time furtively collecting the necessary material from charnel-houses and rooms where dissected limbs are stored. Victor's obsession with his work

---

[85] See Paul McFedries' website, *Word Spy*, Frankenfood entry, available at http://wordspy.com/words/Frankenfood.asp. See also Kristen Philipkoski, 'Cracking the Frankenfood Code', *Wired Magazine*, posted October 2003, available at http://www.wired.com/news/medtech/0,1286,60911,00.html Another source is Jonathan Rauch, 'Will Frankenfood save the planet?' *The Atlantic Monthly*, October 2003, available at http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2003/10/rauch.htm

[86] Braidotti, 'Signs of Wonder'.

leads him to ignore his family as he spends the majority of his time working on the creation of a human being.

Upon completion of his project, Frankenstein perceives his creation as monstrous, abandons the creature and flees. When Frankenstein again encounters the creature the monster says that his own great unhappiness and sense of rejection has made him act in violent and malicious ways. As well as the destruction of a family's home, the monster is responsible for the death of Frankenstein's younger brother and his mother's trusted servant. The creature demands a female monster to be made by Frankenstein who refuses but then relents. Frankenstein, however, becomes troubled by the prospect of a male and a female monster producing monstrous offspring that may pose a threat to the well-being of humanity. The scientist tears the partly finished female body apart. Frankenstein's monster vows to revenge himself upon his creator. On Frankenstein's wedding night the creature kills again. He strangles Frankenstein's bride, Elizabeth. Frankenstein pursues the monster and finally dies. The creature appears at Frankenstein's deathbed and relates the intense suffering that revenge upon his creator has cost him. Then, the creature leaves vowing to die in the wilderness.

Mary Shelley's story of scientific hubris and parental rejection winds a number of threads around the central figures of the monstrous creator and creature. Male desire to usurp female reproductive powers is figured as destructive as Frankenstein neglects his own health and his family in his obsessive quest to animate lifeless flesh. Frankenstein's paternal rejection of the creature ultimately sets the monster on a path of vengeful retribution against all of humanity, especially the father-figure who betrays and abandons his creation. Throughout the narrative mothers and maternal figures succumb to death. Frankenstein's mother dies after nursing Elizabeth through scarlet fever. The monster frames the motherly servant, Justine as the murderer of Frankenstein's brother. Frankenstein's wife, Elizabeth's potential to have children with him is aborted by her murder. The scientist's destruction of the female monster seals off the male creature from companionship and the possibility of producing offspring. A masculine repudiation of female maternity is depicted in the self-centred and obsessive Frankenstein who is grounded in science, jealous of female reproductive capabilities, and unwilling to accept responsibility for nurturing life he brought into the world. Through his anguished conversations with Frankenstein, the monster is

revealed to have a sense of humanity and a desire for nurturance and love that far outstrip his creator's ability to act as a maternal or paternal body.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a reworking of personal, political and literary fragments stitched into narratives that consistently go beyond the boundaries of the text. Undoubtedly, her life was strongly influenced by her extensive experience of pregnancy, childbirth and death. From the time she was sixteen till she reached her twenties Shelley spent the majority of her time pregnant, engaging in a thoroughly organized reading program, nursing ailing infants or burying her dead children. It is significant to note that Mary Shelley was one of the very few female writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century to actually bear children as well as write, however indirectly, about reproduction. In *Frankenstein*, Shelley uses elements of her personal history interwoven with literary and political fragments to create a monstrously maternal text.[87]

Throughout *Frankenstein*, the complicated weave of personal, literary and political influences opens up spaces that permit subversive expressions of maternal desire as well as challenges to masculinist discourses and scientific culture. The first strand of Mary Shelley's personal influence sews into the narrative a personal maternal desire in the use of names and familial positions of some of Mary Shelley's relatives in her novel.[88] Another thread of personal maternal longing is apparent in the presence of motherless characters in the midst of the narrative. Both the monster and Safie, the Turkish girl whom the creature observes after he has fled from Frankenstein's room, are motherless orphans. Mary Shelley was herself (famously) motherless as Mary Wollstonecraft died giving birth to her. Critics routinely list these and other real life instances of birth and death that undoubtedly affected Mary Shelley and influenced her writings.[89] The third thread combining maternal desire and lived experience that impacts upon the text involves the notion of the re-birthing or re-animation of

---

[87] For discussion of these intertwinings see Mary K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*, (New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 40-43; Mary Evans, (ed), *Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 427-440; and, Emily W. Sunstein, *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), pp. 122-126.

[88] Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Monsters*, p. 40; Evans, *Feminism*, pp. 427-428, 436; and, Sunstein, *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality*, p. 123.

[89] Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Monsters* pp. 40-43; Evans, *Feminism*, pp. 427-440; and, Sunstein, *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality*, pp. 122-126.

corpses.[90] This first occurred to Mary Shelley in an extremely vivid dream set down in her journal in which she held her dead child before a fire and warmed the infant so that it returned to life.[91]

Mothers and maternal forces in *Frankenstein* reinforce and rework Shelley's lived experience of paradoxes of giving birth to death. For instance, Frankenstein's mother dies of scarlet fever after nursing her adopted daughter, Elizabeth through the disease. Frankenstein dreams vividly of the death of his mother and his fiancé, Elizabeth. The birth place of the creature, Frankenstein's laboratory is a technological rather than a "natural" or "living" womb. Frankenstein's creature murders most of the scientist's close family. As a significant number of critics who investigate the novel remark, the text channels the notion of life and death feeding upon each other. *Frankenstein* depicts birth as an abject harbinger of death, inevitably mired in flesh, decay and termination. These deaths – both outside and within the text of *Frankenstein* - foreground maternal bodies and reproductive processes as the beginnings and endings of life are drawn towards each other rather than bookending a lifetime journey.[92] The maternal reproducing body is implicated in the numerous deaths in the novel, thus troubling birth/death binaries that align motherbodies with new life rather than termination.

As well as interweavings of lived experience and maternal desire, Mary Shelley also reworks a number of literary influences in *Frankenstein*.[93] The desire to create life, and a subsequent challenge to orthodox Christian creation myths, lies at the heart of one of the major inspirations for *Frankenstein* - John Milton's epic, *Paradise Lost.* The substance of *Paradise Lost* is a challenging of the dominant creation myth of

---

[90] Geraldine Cousin, *Women in Dramatic Place and Time: Contemporary Female Characters on Stage*, (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 122-123. Sunstein, *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality*, p. 97.

[91] Cousin, *Women in Dramatic Place and Time*, pp. 122-123. Sunstein, *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality*, p. 97.

[92] Paul Youngquist, 'Frankenstein: The Mother, the Daughter, and the Monster', *Philological Quarterly* 70, 3 (Summer 1991) pp. 339-359.

[93] Mellor, 'Making a "monster": an introduction to *Frankenstein*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, edited by Esthter Shor, pp. 9-25, pp. 10-12, 22-24, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 10-12, 22-24 and Burton R. Pollin, 'Philosophical and Literary Sources of *Frankenstein*'. *Comparative Literature*, Vol 17, No 2, (Spring 1965), University of Oregon, pp. 97-108.

western culture. *Frankenstein* questions the Christian doctrine of creation by subjecting this story to intellectual examination.

I argue that *Frankenstein*'s reworkings of personal, political, and literary influences open up channels for expressions of maternal/authorial desire which, in turn, challenge masculinist discourses and narratives of scientific advancement. Literary critic, Ann Mellor's influential argument concerning the book contends that *Frankenstein* demonstrates western culture's privileging of masculine discourses over female narratives.[94] Using Frankenstein's identification of Nature as feminine Mellor observes that the novel provides textual illustrations of the dangers inherent in ordering the world according to conventionally gendered expectations.[95] Mellor argues that in *Frankenstein*, monsters arise from the repression of the domestic sphere.[96] As a result of Frankenstein's inability to access his feeling and emotional self in the due course of his work, he is unable to behave empathetically toward the creature. For example, Frankenstein makes the monster in the form of a giant solely because "the minuteness of the parts (of ordinary bodies) formed a great hindrance to my speed".[97] The creator also refuses to assume any responsibility for his creation and expresses abhorrence rather than affection for the monster. As well as this emotional and ethical denial, Frankenstein is so focused on himself that he fails to recognize the threat to his fiancé when the monster swears that he will be with his creator on his wedding-night. This blindness of Frankenstein results in the death of his wife, Elizabeth.

According to Mellor, Frankenstein's usurping of female reproductive capabilities by scientific and technological means is another aspect of the novel's examination of the deleterious effects of the conventional delineation of women as passive, and acquiescent to male ambitions and desires.[98] Mellor argues that it is the conventional notion of science and technology as successful due to its severing of ties to the

---

[94] See, for example the following - Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Monster;* Mellor, 'On Feminist Utopias, *Women's Studies*, Vol 9, 1982, pp. 241-262; and, Mellor, Audrey A. Fisch, Esther H. Schor, *The Other Mary Shelley: Beyond Frankenstein*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). Mellor's critique of the novel as a monstrous reflection of a male dominated culture inspired a significant proportion of subsequent feminist interpretations of the text.

[95] See Mellor, 'On Feminist Utopias'; Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Monsters*; and, Mellor, Fisch, Schor, *The Other Mary Shelley.*

[96] Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Monsters*, pp. 115-126.

[97] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, p. 49.

feminine and the domestic that is rendered as monstrous in the fiction.[99] Through the doubled figures of the monstrous creator and creation, Mary Shelley critiques masculine attempts to usurp reproductive capabilities as her text draws upon the male figure of the scientist whose replacement of the feminine and the domestic with an obsessive exploration of the principles and practices of science and reproduction incites violence, suffering and death.

Frankenstein creates a male monster he feels unable to love and does not parent. It is in the creation and destruction of the female creature that Frankenstein's anxieties concerning female powers of reproduction are most clearly outlined. While the scientist creates a son, he is unable to produce a daughter. Frankenstein's artificial womb becomes the site of the abortion of the female monster. His reasoning concerning the tearing up of the female monster reveals that he is fearful of her will and her desires which may not coincide with or be able to be controlled by the male creature. Frankenstein anticipates a female monster who is "ten thousand times more evil than her mate".[100] Frankenstein also wonders whether the male monster might find his mate too ugly and therefore return to harassment of humans. Upon further consideration, Frankenstein debates whether the female may prefer human males and, with her enormous size and physical strength, rape her selected victims.[101] He also expresses his fear at the possibility of the monsters breeding creatures that menace humanity and have the potential to wipe out the entire race of humans.[102]

The descriptions of Frankenstein's destruction of the female monster illustrate his fear of female reproductive powers and sexuality. He reasserts his power over the almost completed female creature by mutilating and tearing apart the body in a passage in the novel that reads like a violent rape scene. Frankenstein states that "trembling with passion, (I) tore to pieces the thing on which I was engaged".[103] The female monster is depicted as already embodied feminine body rather than an about-to-be-embodied corpse. Frankenstein says: "The remains of the half-finished creature,

---

[98] Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Monsters*, pp. 115-126.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, p. 163.

[101] Ibid, pp. 163-165.

[102] Ibid, pp. 165-166.

[103] Ibid, p. 167.

whom I had destroyed, lay scattered on the floor, and I almost felt as if I had mangled the living flesh of a human being".[104]

Drawing upon Mellor's influential feminist critical investigation of *Frankenstein*, literary critic Harriet Hustis argues that it is Frankenstein's failure to engage in "responsible creativity" that births destructive monstrosity.[105] Hustis posits that *Frankenstein* provides an example of the disastrous results of male refusal to take responsibility for their creations (responsible creativity).[106] Frankenstein demonstrates that he is unable to feel affection for his creation which would enable him to parent and care for his monster. Instead, Frankenstein voices his horror and repulsion at the sight of the creature. Ironically, the monster is depicted in contrast to his creator, as articulate, perceptive and longing for human companionship. The creature describes himself as monstrous as he lacks familial nurturance. It is this negligence of parental duty and not the use of a technological rather than fleshy womb that Hustis claims produces violent monstrosity.[107]

Monstrous Bodies

While the unruly humour and carnivalesque excess of the Bad Mothers of the *BMC* render them as monstrous maternal bodies the maternity in *Patchwork Girl* is monstrous through literary associations with textual monsters, fragmented flesh and hypertext. Threads of monstrosity and the monstrous are deeply embedded in the fabric of the text that informs and shapes *Patchwork Girl – Frankenstein.* These strands are also evident throughout Mary Shelley's life. Shelly was an unmarried mother at first, a female writer and a woman used to mixing in literary and political circles. Thus, she is a fitting candidate, according to nineteenth-century dominant discourses, for categorisation as a monster. The author refers to *Frankenstein* as her "hideous progeny" as well as calling the creature a monster, fiend, devil, fiend and

---

[104] Ibid, p. 167.

[105] Harriet Hustis, 'Responsible Creativity and the "Modernity" of Mary Shelley's Prometheus', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, Vol 43, No. 4, Autumn 2003, pp. 845-858. For a similar argument see the following: James Wohlpart, 'A Tradition of Male Poetics: Mary Shelley's Frankenstein as an Allegory of Art.' *Midwest Quarterly,* Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 265-280, 1998 and Michelle Levy, 'Discovery and the Domestic Affections in Coleridge and Shelley', *Studies in English Literature, 1500 – 1900*, Baltimore: Autumn, 2004, Vol., 44, Iss. 4; pp. 693- 715.

[106] Hustis, 'Responsible Creativity'.

deamon.[108] Shelley's construction of Frankenstein's creature, the product of furtive assemblings of parts of dead bodies, makes use of the Romantic sensibility concerning the representation of violent breaches of "Nature" evidenced by deformity and couplings of disparate physical elements. This aspect of the myth of Frankenstein continues to influence adaptations of the narrative.

Judith Halberstam examines monstrosity in *Frankenstein* in terms of the Gothic novel.[109] She describes the Gothic novel as a technology that produces the figure of the monster as a fluid, porous screen on which interpretations are projected.[110] Halberstam writes that

> The monster's body ... is a machine that, in its Gothic mode, produces meaning and can represent any horrible trait that the reader feeds into the narrative. The monster functions as monster ... when it is able to condense as many fear-provoking traits as possible into one body. Hence the sense that Frankenstein's monster is bursting out of his skin – he is indeed filled to bursting point with flesh and meaning both.[111]

Rosi Braidotti, argues that the figure of the monster works in two ways.[112] It is the other of the hegemonic subject. The monster is also a transgression of subjectivity conceived in rigidly ordered and binarized dualisms. Braidotti's work on the monstrous demonstrates the links between notions of monstrosity and the increasing explanatory power historically acceded to sciences such as medicine and biology.[113] She mobilizes the term "teratology" to refer to "scientific discourse about the origin and nature of monstrous bodies".[114] In order to demonstrate the "norm", particular

---

[107] Ibid, pp. 845-858.

[108] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Preface.

[109] Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995).

[110] Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, pp. 2 – 21.

[111] Ibid, p. 21.

[112] Rosi Braidotti, 'Signs of Wonder';Margrit Shildrick, 'This Body which is not One: Dealing with Differences', *Body and Society*, 5, no. 2-3, 1999, pp. 77-92; Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Monster Culture (Seven Theses) in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, pp. 3-25, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 1996).

Rosi Braidotti, 'Signs of Wonder', pp. 135-152.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Rosi Braidotti, 'Cyberteratologies: Female Monsters Negotiate the Other's Participation in Humanity's Far Future', in *Envisioning the Future: Science Fiction and the Next Millenium*

bodies are necessarily marked by scientific discourse as abnormal. Certain proper bodies are then able to point the finger at other deviant bodies which stand as the monstrous "other" to the culturally defined conceptualisations of the natural realm. Monstrosity is then delineated by the examination and visual display – externally and internally – of the body that deviates from the norm. Whether monsters are defined by scientific means or notions of excess, they are always tied to disciplining forces that attempt to contain monstrous forces within hegemonic narratives.

Historically the monstrous is connected to the feminine through discourses of rationality, biology, and gender. Feminist film critic Barbara Creed argues that conceptualisations of the monster are created within and through the mobilization of discourses of female embodiment and sexuality.[115] Creed describes the monstrous-feminine in terms of two figures – the mother and the castrating woman (vagina dentata).[116] Rosi Braidotti states that culturally the feminine is often linked to the monster as narratives of monstrosity position women as always potentially monstrous.[117]

Rosi Braidotti argues that intersections of gender, race and teratology connect with discursive forces intent upon the surveillence and control of female bodies.[118] From this, Braidotti concludes that teratological discourses display the connectivities of narratives of gender and race as well as revealing that they are integral to scientific constructions of feminine bodies.[119] Therefore, the monster, in a similar vein to the cyborg, is not an innocent inhabitant of the Garden of Eden. The monstrous is always imbricated in racialized and gendered discourses. It is not so much a concept or a body, it is more of a field or plane of interconnective flows of gender, race, flesh, and paradox. As Braidotti writes, "The monstrous body, more than an object, is *a shifter,* a vehicle that constructs a web of interconnected and yet potentially contradictory discourses about his or her embodied self. Gender and race are primary operators in

---

edited by Marleen S. Barr, (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), pp. 146-172, p. 146.

[115] Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, (New York: Routledge, 1993).

[116] Ibid, pp. 106-108.

[117] *Interview with Rosi Braidotti*, available at http://users.skynet.be/nattyweb/RosiIInt.htm

[118] Braidotti, 'Signs of Wonder', p. 300.

[119] Ibid, p. 300.

this process."[120] Braidotti concludes that "the monster is a process without a stable object. It makes knowledge happen by circulating sometimes as the most irrational non-object. It is slippery ... it persists in haunting not only our imagination but also our scientific knowledge-claims. Difference will just not go away."[121]

According to Braidotti, the monster is tinged with traces of familiarity and strangeness - a being of a liminal "twilight-zone" of multiple possibilities.[122] Monstrosity then marks difference from the holy western canon of white, male, heterosexual, middle-class, able-bodied, Christian, scientifically oriented subject position. However, this process of negation is fundamentally important in the delineation of boundaries and limits that offer descriptions of the normative human subject. Braidotti underscores the connection between discourses of racism and orientalism and the "freak shows" particularly enjoyed by eighteenth and nineteenth century European audiences.[123] Braidotti argues that audiences attending exhibitions of "freaks" desired the shocking sight of members of what were classified as primitive races by a scientific discourse that upheld the notion of the white race as superior to all others.[124]

Maternity and the monstrous are closely intertwined. The pregnant body (mother-to-be) defies attempts to delineate clear boundaries between bodies of mother and "child" and of states of life and death. Pregnant embodiment in its changing, leaking, noisy, hormonally-charged, multiplying enfleshment seeps and grows beyond the usual limitations and boundaries of the human body. Rosi Bradotti claims that women are also constructed as the possible producers of monstrosity – they are able to birth monsters. In contrast to notions of rationality (the specific transforming into the universal), the female imagination (roped to the particular and the feminine body) was long thought of as the progenitor of monstrosity.[125] Braidotti writes:

> The mother was said to have the actual power of producing a monstrous baby simply by: (a) thinking about awful things during intercourse ..;(b)

---

[120] Ibid, p. 300, emphasis added.

[121] Ibid, p. 300.

[122] Ibid, p. 301.

[123] Ibid, p. 302.

[124] Ibid, p. 300.

[125] Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 85-86.

> dreaming very intensely about something or somebody; or (c) looking at animals or evil-looking creatures (this is the Xerox-machine complex: if a woman looked at a dog, for instance, with a certain look in her eyes, then she would have the power of transmitting that image to the fetus and reproducing it exactly, thus creating a dog-faced baby).[126]

This notion of the monstrous maternal imagination was an authoritative narrative until the end of the eighteenth century.[127] While this conceptualisation of potentially monstrous maternity is no longer given credence in medical discourse, it lives on in the continuing pathologization of women and their bodies in certain scientific narratives. Women's imaginations are still considered in terms of the production of monsters.

The body of the monster, strongly aligned with femininity and maternity, lopes through cultural, social, scientific and technological narratives. It is firmly entrenched in the popular imaginary and looms large in countless creative works of fiction and non-fiction. Having investigated some of the threads of monstrosity and the monster in one of the most influential stories of monstrous maternity, the book, *Frankenstein*, I now move to examine this phenomena by plunging into the hypertextings of monstrosity and maternity in *Patchwork Girl*.

Patchwork Girl – Into the Text.

The previous sections *In the Flesh* and *Patchy Navigations and Techno-Needlework* describe the shape and pattern of *Patchwork Girl* as well as exploring how the text makes use of the qualities and capabilities of hypertext in the production of a dynamic hyperfiction. In order to focus on issues and images of maternity and monstrosity that permeate *Patchwork Girl* I meld two notions - Rosi Braidotti's concept of the monster as a "shifter" and Judith Halberstam's idea of the monstrous as a screen. In a hypertextual moment I add to this combination of theory N. Katherine Hayles' notion of the flickering signifier as an acknowledgement of the digital medium *Patchwork Girl* inhabits. While most of the bodies in the text are monstrous many are also motherbodies. Maternal bodies take precedence in this text, especially the Frankensteinian maternity of the reader/interactor who works in collaboration with the

---

[126] Ibid, p. 86.

[127] Ibid, pp. 85-86.

author Shelley Jackson and the author/character, Mary Shelley, as well as Patchwork Girl who seems to have a mind of her own.

Given that *Patchwork Girl* is so intrinsically threaded through with maternal desires and flesh I was surprised at the lack of feminist critical engagement with these issues. Most critics writing about *Patchwork Girl* focus on the text's clever utilization of the capacities of hypertext.[128] The blending of diverse material (ranging from postmodern theory to popular novels) into a narrative through irreverent bricolage and pastiche is another aspect of the text explored by critics.[129] Critical investigations of gender, identity and fragmented subjectivity are also undertaken by theorists.[130] Yet, maternity remains a largely unexamined force in the text. Those critics who do consider the maternal flows of *Patchwork Girl* marginalize the topic, mentioning rather than investigating the maternal bodies that rampage through the text.[131]

N. Katherine Hayles writes at length about *Patchwork Girl* but offers only one paragraph that touches on maternity in the text.[132] Hayles' concentration on a medium-specific analysis delivers an insightful engagement with Patchwork Girl as a hyperfiction that, she argues, is both extremely original and closely dependent upon a diverse range of print texts. The interrogation of *Patchwork Girl* hinges on Hayles' assessment of it as "one of the best new electronic fictions" being an exponent of the "new medium' which "will enact and express a new kind of subjectivity".[133] One of the "new kind(s) of subjectivity" that I argue *Patchwork Girl* brings forth is a queerly monstrous maternity that seethes and oozes through many of the lexias. Hayles,

---

[128] Landow, *Hypertext 2.0*, pp. 198-205; Hayles, 'Flickering Connectivities'; *Patchwork Girl Comments, Etc*, Brown University Web pages investigating Patchwork Girl, available at http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/cpace/ht/pg/ferreira.html, date accessed, 2/1/05; and, Amerika, 'Stitch Bitch'.

[129] *Patchwork Girl Comments, Etc*, Brown University Web Pages and Landow, *Hypertext 2.0*, pp. 198-205.

[130] Hayles, 'Flickering Connectivities' and *Patchwork Girl Comments, Etc*, Brown University Web pages.

[131] Mary Aline Salgueiro Seabra Ferreira, 'Shelley Jackson's Patchwork Girl and Angela Carter's The Passion of New Eve: A Comparative Reading', *Patchwork Girl Comments, Etc*, Brown University Web pages investigating Patchwork Girl, available at http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/cpace/ht/pg/ferreira.html, date accessed, 2/1/05; David Goldberg, 'Comments on Patchwork Girl', Brown University Web pages, English 112, 1996, available at http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/cpace/ht/pg/dpatch.html, date accessed 3/4/05; and, Hayles, 'Flickering Connectivities'.

[132] Hayles, 'Flickering Connectivities'.

[133] Ibid.

however, does not explore this vitally important aspect of the text. Aside from her concentration on a medium-specific analysis, Hayles writes one paragraph that consider maternity in *Patchwork Girl*. Her brief investigation of maternity in the text focuses on Jackson's transformation of the author, Mary Shelley's phrase "my hideous progeny" from one that applies to the often brutal realities of nineteenth-century childbirth and authorship to the desire-laden celebration of hypertexted monstrosity.[134] The phrase assumes an irreverently celebratory weave as it foregrounds the desire of Mary Shelley (character) – and the reader's narrative desire –for her monstrous creation: "Lover, friend, collaborator".[135] After this gesturing toward an examination of several threads of maternal desire and authorship, Hayles reverts to a discussion of hypertext, monstrosity and writing.

Other academic critiques of *Patchwork Girl* also gloss rather than interrogate tropes of maternity in the text. For instance, academic Mary Aline Salgueiro Seabra Ferreira's investigation of Patchwork Girl mentions maternity in the text.[136] The article is posted on one of Brown University's Web pages initially set up by George Landow in order to critically examine *Patchwork Girl*. While Ferreira underlines the significance of Mary Shelley's creation of a female monster and the construction of the nineteenth-century author as a mother-figure, analysis of maternal desire and flesh is superficial and somewhat prudish. In a remarkably coy comment Ferreira states that "Teaching the Monster, Mary Shelley learns things about herself she would not otherwise."[137] Indeed. This understatement barely hints at the passion and longing expressed by both Patchwork Girl and Mary Shelley for each other. Similarly, Ferreira's minimization of the sexual aspect of the relationship between Mary Shelley and Patchwork Girl speaks of the power of traditional tropes of motherhood as well as the recurrent valency of the incest taboo and heteronormative sexuality in the refusal of lesbianism. For example, Ferreira writes "the relationship between Mary Shelley and the female monster is profoundly ambivalent and there are strong suggestions of incest between "mother" and "daughter" in an ambiguous bedroom scene".[138] While

---

[134] Ibid. Mary Shelley, the author of *Frankenstein* refers to the text as "my hideous progeny" in the book's preface.

[135] Ibid.

[136] Mary Aline Salgueiro Seabra Ferreira, 'Shelley Jackson's Patchwork Girl'.

[137] Ibid.

[138] Ibid.

the story of Patchwork Girl is often rendered in lyrical and poetic language, the meanings of the text are readily available to close scrutiny. Patchwork Girl and Mary Shelley clearly express their desire for each other and become lovers. Ferreira briefly alludes to this fact before turning to a discussion of some of the ways in which the qualities of hypertext reflects aspects of identity.

Maternity is mentioned in other investigations of *Patchwork Girl* in terms of the creation or simulation of life. For instance, academic David Goldberg's 'Comments on Patchwork Girl' enters into a discussion of Baudrillard's simulacra and the "phantasm of auto-genesis".[139] Goldberg quotes Baudrillard arguing that "Cloning radically abolishes the Mother, but also the Father".[140] A discussion follows in which the desire for the creation of life using artificial means is contextually aligned with postmodern theory. And so, the article continues down the much worn path that interrogates *Patchwork Girl* as an electronic text and Patchwork Girl as a copy without original that speaks of fragmented identity.

Despite the glances towards monstrous maternity in *Patchwork Girl*, why is there widespread silence or marginalization of maternal bodies in the criticism of the hyperfiction when, as I show, maternity is vitally important to the text. This is especially concerning given that motherhood and maternal bodies are prime objects of concern and investigation by feminist scholars. It is a significant omission. This silencing or marginalization of maternal voices in the criticism of the text is a reinstatement of a number of dusty yet potent binaries. In these binaries hypertext and contemporary technologies are constructed as new and exciting in opposition to maternity which is conventionally depicted as staid, boring and, in a sense, old fashioned. Other binaries mobilized by the failure to address issues of maternity in Patchwork Girl also fall along the lines of hypertext (new)/maternity(old): masculine/feminine, technology/flesh, normative/queer, and mind/body. Perhaps, in this lack of critical examination of maternal bodies in a monstrous text there is also a fear of queer monstrous maternity.

---

[139] David Goldberg, 'Comments on Patchwork Girl'.

[140] Ibid.

Stitch Bitches: How to Sew/Write a Mother of a Monster

Notions of the monster as machine and screen are useful for the investigation of a hyperfiction and N. Katherine Hayles' concept of the flickering signifier adds an important dimension to the examination of this digital text. Hayles argues that the notion of the signifier promoted by Saussure, Lacan and others as unitary and flat is particular to print texts whereas signifiers in cyber(cultural)space are complex and multi-layered.[141] Hayles uses the term "flickering" to distinguish the electronic signifier from its print counterpart and also to underline its qualities. In contrast to print signification, screenic signifiers are based in computer code which creates layered and mobile images that are continually being refreshed. Hayles writes "In informatics, the signifier can no longer be understood as a single marker, for example an ink mark on a page. Rather it exists as a flexible chain of markers bound together by the arbitrary relations specified by the relevant codes."[142] These are not trivial differences as they mark signifiers on the screen and what they represent as crucially more mobile, fluid and multiplicitous than print or oral signifiers and signifieds.

Hypertexting the notions of flickering signifier and shape shifting monster, I conceive of maternity in *Patchwork Girl* as a flickering screen that distorts, enfleshes and subverts the conventional maternal body of motherhood and authorship. I argue that the gerund "flickering" implies moving and shifting, which when applied to monstrosity, in this case, evokes Braidotti's concept of the monster as "shifter". This constantly moving, flickering screen functions much like the crazy mirrors found in mazes at carnivals, agricultural shows, or sideshows. The crazy mirrors of sideshow alleys distort the body shape of the person looking into the reflective surface. The person looking at the reflection may have a larger or smaller body shown in the mirror than his/her actual size. The body may be oddly elongated or grossly compacted or the proportions could be completely altered from their real world dimensions. I argue that in *Patchwork Girl*, maternity's flickering screen rewrites conventional notions of

---

[141] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 26-35; Ferdinand de Saussaure, *Course in General Linguistics,* trans. Roy Harris, (Peru, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, [1972], 2000); Jaques Lacan, *Ecrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (London: Routledge, 1977); and, Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).

[142] Hayles, *Posthuman,* p. 31.

motherhood as grounded in heteronormative longing and contained acquiescent flesh to one of queer desire and fleshy monstrosity.

On the text's flickering screen of maternity, collaborative threads of maternal bodies, authorship, readership, queerness and monstrosity weave together in the birth of the monster which occurs in the story line and hypertextually on the monitor at the hand of the reader/interactor. The scars and seams of *Patchwork Girl* create a hybrid monstrous maternity of gender indeterminacy and fragmented identity. *Patchwork Girl* draws upon analogies of stitching and piecing disparate parts together to produce an entirely new creation. This techno-needlework enables the reader/interactor to both follow the associations that are directed by the author as well as forging their own linkages produced by the work's hyperlinks. In this manner of linking and rupture, the text brings together, separates and then births through the actions of the reader /interactor diverse images, corporealities, writings, genres and ideas. These new monstrous forms lurch along the network of literal and metaphorical scars and sutures that make up the viewer constructed hypertext. The carefully contrived diversity of *Patchwork Girl* that coagulates on many levels is summed up by George Landow as he states that it is a "hypertext parable of writing and identity, (which) generates both its themes and its techniques from the kinds of collage writing intrinsic to hypertext".[143]

George Landow posits that

> *Patchwork Girl* makes us all into Frankenstein-readers stitching together narrative, gender and identity, for as Patchwork Girl reminds us, 'you could say all bodies are written bodies, all lives pieces of writing' (all written). This digital collage-narrative assembles Shelley Jackson's (and Mary Shelley's and Frankenstein's) female monster, forming a hypertext Everywoman who embodies assemblage, concatenation, juxtaposition, and blurred, recreated identities – one of many digital fulfillments of twentieth-century literary and pictorial collages."[144]

Jackson states clearly her intention for viewers of her hyperfiction to go beyond the sedentary role of consumer of text to active participant in the assembling of story, words and image. She demands that reader/interactors do just that – scan the segments

---

[143] George Landow, *Hypertext 2.0,* p. 198.

[144] Ibid, p. 200.

of text and image, select and then assemble the parts into a whole. This project is stated explicitly by the monster in one of the first divisions:

> I am buried here. You can resurrect me, but only piecemeal. If you want to see the whole, you will have to sew me together yourself. (In time you may find appended a pattern and instructions – for now, you will have to put it together any which way, as the scientist Frankenstein was forced to do.) Like him, you will make use of a machine of mysterious complexity to animate these parts (graveyard).

In-text creation of the female monster describes a rewriting of narratives of birth and motherhood. The conventional notion of maternity states that a woman gives birth once at any time. (I am including multiple births as they usually occur in the same way during a relatively short space of time.) In contrast to this finite act, narratives of maternity in the hyperfiction are queered as the "birth" of Patchwork Girl is described as the result of many diverse and ongoing acts. According to the narrator, Patchwork Girl's birth "takes place more than once. In the plea of a bygone monster; from a muddy hole by corpse-light; under the needle, and under the pen" (*crazy quilt/birth*). This description of birth hypertexts Mary Shelley's male monster, Shelley's authorship and herself as character, Patchwork Girl herself, Shelley Jackson's work as author and the click-linking of the reader/interactor. At all times the playful multi-vocality of the hypertext is underlined by Jackson's text, images and linking.

Just as the monstrous Patchwork Girl is constructed from disparate body parts, she also seems to be an assemblage of influences and suggestions. For instance she says "I am a mixed metaphor. Metaphor, meaning something like 'bearing across', is itself a fine metaphor for my condition. Every part of me is linked to other territories alien to it but equally mine." (*body of text/metaphor me*). Thus, *Patchwork Girl* mobilizes hypertext and hypertextual qualities in order to interrogate conventional notions of narrative, gender and maternal identity.

The stitching together of Patchwork Girl's parts and identities as well as a diversity of texts occurs under the banner, skilfully embroidered by Shelley Jackson, of quilting. This multiplicity of identity and flesh seamed by scars is foregrounded in the *crazy quilt* section. For example, the following divisions relate authorial anxieties about creating and demonstrate the multivocality of *Patchwork Girl*:

> At first I couldn't think what to make her of. I collected bones from charnel houses, paragraphs from Heart of Darkness, and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame, but finally in searching through a chest in a solitary chamber, or rather cell, at the top of the house, I came across an old patchwork quilt, a fabric of relations, which my grandmother once made when she was young (*crazy quilt/research*).

Here the maternal is represented in the reference to Mary Shelley's grandmother making the quilt that becomes an important part of the hyperfiction. This mention of "a fabric of relations" suggests a maternal lineage.

In the subdivision *conception*, Jackson again, smoothly combines outwardly unrelated texts:

> When I found the quilt, I became nervous to a most painful degree, the fall of a leaf startled me, and I shunned my fellow creatures as if I had been guilty of a crime. Wasn't writing the realm of the Truth? Isn't the Truth clear, distinct, and one? But I said to myself that the quilt would do nicely for the girl, for when she was brought to life she would not be proud nor haughty, as the Glass Cat is ... (*crazy quilt/conception*).

These two subdivisions are formed by Jackson from Baum's *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*, Helene Cixous's *Coming to Writing*, and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.[145] Patchwork Girl, herself is described by Mary Shelley in the text as having skin that was riddled with scars and segments of different types of skin "as distinct as patches in a quilt" (*crazy quilt/I moved*). Scars show the links and breaks in the narratives – the joins and spaces where the flickering screen of maternity is evident. While *Patchwork Girl* incorporates these print works in to her fragmented body, Jackson's hyperfiction openly enjoys a wry self-reflexivity and witty knowledge of literary texts that range from the academic to popular culture to the canonical.

Further levels of appropriation occur in the hyperfiction when Jackson utilizes some of Jacques Derrida's words to describe Patchwork Girl. Jackson also uses and subverts Derrida's roping of the father to language with a reclamation of the 'word' from the paternal to the maternal. The words of Derrida are used mostly in the *Patchwork Girl* subdivision, *Interrupting D* which begins with his pronouncement,

---

[145] Helene Cixous, *Coming to Writing and Other Essays*. With an introductory essay by Susan Rubin Suleiman. Edited and translated by Deborah Jenson. Translated by Sarah Cornell, Ann Liddle and Susan Sellers. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991.

"As a living thing, logos issues from a father".[146] Derrida's description of language as directly issuing from a male line evacuates femininity and maternity from word production. For Derrida it is the father who bestows the word upon the son as a birth-right whereas the mother is without words and, thus, remains silent. In *Disseminations* Derrida describes the logos as both alive and dead, the likeness of breath, and a dead body brought back from the grave.[147] He continues his analysis of logos and language by describing the latter as zombie-like and ghostly - occupying the status of the intermediary and eternally "alive".[148]

In the subdivision *Interrupting D*, Shelley Jackson uses Derrida's words to describe her own monster as "An outlaw, a pervert, a bad seed/ - a monster- / a vagrant, an adventurer, a bum" (*Interrupting D*).[149] Here the author hijacks Derrida's attribution of language to fathers and his evacuation of maternal shapings of language development. Instead, Jackson boldly claims the attributes of language for the unnamed character in this subdivision who could be the monster or Mary Shelley who mothers the creature. The language Jackson uses here - pervert, vagrant, adventurer, bum - stands outside descriptive terms that conventionally adhere to and describe traditional females, especially maternal bodies. In Jackson's text, the mothers (Shelley/Jackson/Patchwork Girl/"reader") not only bestow language, they play with it and laugh at the hybrid constructions that are birthed from intertwinings of maternity, monstrosity and queer desire. Jackson's remediating of the Frankenstein myth insists that language belongs to both the maternal creator, Mary Shelley (the author and the character in the hypertext) and her monstrous creation (Patchwork Girl, herself). It is significant that the monster is gendered female and she and her creator trample upon conventions of femininity. In this text, it is the flickering screen of maternity (Jackson's construction of maternal bodies as cheerfully abject and triumphantly queer), that enables the protagonist to poetically use language and offer it to the reader/interactor to take, read and manipulate him/herself as a body who is, in turn, birthing their own textual version of Patchwork Girl.

---

[146] Derrida, *Disseminations*, p. 144.

[147] Ibid.

[148] Ibid.

[149] Ibid, p. 143.

Jackson's subversive play with conventional femininity, maternity and male dominated discourse moves from a focus on the domains of language and literary theory to include reworkings of traditionally feminine "domestic artforms". In celebratory defiance of warnings from feminists art theorists, Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock who contend that "any association with the traditions and practices of needlework and domestic art can be dangerous for an artist, especially if that artist is a woman",[150] Jackson skilfully uses the quilt as a metaphor and device for the exploration of multiple identities, writing as a process, and hybrid subjectivities. Jackson taps into the subversion of traditional tropes that feminist writer Elaine Showalter calls for in the "creative manipulation of conventions".[151] Showalter sums up the long held associations between quilting and writing in a gendered economy:

> Like other American cultural practices and symbols, quilting has also undergone a series of gender transformations, appropriations, and commodifications within the larger culture. While quilting does have crucial meaning for American women's texts, it can't be taken as a transhistorical and essential form of female expression, but rather as a gendered practice that changed from one generation to the next .. [152]

Wrapped in various lengths of quilt, *Patchwork Girl* enables interrogations of fragmented identities and yearnings for wholeness. As well as human relations, *Patchwork Girl*'s fissured body also considers and enables interactions between texts. Jackson's text explicitly wrestles with postmodern theoretical concerns including Derrida's writings on textuality, Kristeva's investigations of intertextuality as well as Barthes' notion of the death of the author which have been outlined in the earlier section, *Hypertext*.[153]

I argue that the interplay of hypertext, user and author in *Patchwork Girl* enacts and reflects a maternal dynamic of creation – collaborative yet fragmented. However, this notion goes only part of the way to recognising Jackson's reworkings of conventional maternity and the unspoken alliance that the reader/interactor enters into

---

[150] Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, (New York: Pantheon, 1981), p. 137.

[151] Elaine Showalter, 'Piecing and Writing' in *The Poetics of Gender*, edited by Nancy K. Miller. (New York: Colmumbia University Press, 1986), pp. 222-247, p. 228.

[152] Elaine Showalter, *Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 147.

[153] Derrida, *Disseminations;* Barthes, 'The Death of the Author'; Kristeva, *Desire in Language;* and, Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue, and the Novel'.

in a subversion of traditional tropes of maternal bodies. Maternity functions here not as a wan metaphor for authorship or giving birth to a creative venture but as a flickering screen of signification which calls for the reader/interactor to directly participate in the becoming monstrous of author, character and viewer/user.

Monstrously Maternal – Desire of the Mother

Maternal bodies, in the figures of Mary Shelley and Patchwork Girl (as well as the reader/interactors), are expressed in terms of queer desire and fleshy monstrosity. The flickering screen of maternity set up in *Patchwork Girl* brazenly challenges traditional tropes of motherhood. In this text, maternity is not mired in binary notions of good mother/bad mother or stay at home (right) mothers/working for pay (wrong). For instance, Mary Shelley and the monster she creates, move beyond and within texts. Mary Shelley shifts from being the author of *Frankenstein* to a character in *Patchwork Girl*, to birthing and loving a monster as well as becoming monstrous herself. Just as it was impossible for Frankenstein's female monster to survive in the pages of the nineteenth century novel, Patchwork Girl will not live meekly in cyber(cultural)space. The rebellious, subversive and dispersed character of the female monster is first indicated in the dotted lines that visually fragment the image of Patchwork Girl and the division, *dotted line*. Dotted lines dissect the body of Patchwork Girl in a similar way to the movements of her scars. While the dotted line graphically depicts Patchwork Girl's similarities and differences with human beings it also indicates movement and travelling beyond two dimensions.[154] It is a line that suggests folding and the image resultantly moving beyond binary thought and practice.[155]

From my claim that maternity and maternal bodies in *Patchwork Girl* are queered not conventional I now have the unenviable task of trying to pin down that slippery term "queer" with its echoes of past insult as well as present diversity and challenge. In the 1980s and 1990s the word "queer" was first used as an "umbrella term" to refer to lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transvestites and transsexuals.[156] While there is some overlap with queer activism, 'Queer Theory' – which emerged in the 1990s – draws

---

[154] Hayles, 'Flickering Connectivities'.

[155] Ibid.

[156] Barbara Creed, "Queering the Media: A Gay Gaze' in *Media Matrix: Sexing the New Reality*, Barbara Creed, (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2003), pp. 136-158, p. 137.

upon ideas of feminism and postmodern theory.[157] Theorists Paul Burston and Colin Richardson argue that "Queer theory gives academic credence to something that lesbians and gay men have known all along – that imagination is, by its very nature, promiscuous".[158] In this comment, Burston and Richardson indicate the slipperiness of discussing the term and its potential for subversion as they align it with the "imagination" – the source of creative wonderings, challenges and desire. It is exactly in this imagining of difference, desire and questioning of norms regarding gender, sexual identity and sexuality that "queer" is located.

Judith Butler, a theorist often associated with queer theory famously argued that gender is not "natural" or divided into two rigid categories – male and female. It is performative.[159] She contends that gender is not a fixed aspect of a person, rather it is fluid and capable of change according to context. Butler states "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender .. identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results".[160] Thus, Butler claims that gender is what a subject *does* not an essential attribute or *who* that person *is*. This notion of gender as changeable and performative argues that gendered identities do not express a fixed inner self as they are the effects not the cause of gendered performance. Butler's concept of gender as perfomance is important for queer theory as it enables the questioning of notions of stable gender and sexual identities. Novelist and theorist Annamarie Jagose writes "Demonstrating the impossibility of any 'natural' sexuality, it (queer) calls into question even such apparently unproblematic terms as 'man' and 'woman'."[161] Summing up the drive to challenge that powers the notion of queer, Barbara Creed states "If we are to attribute a clear and definite meaning to queer, it would be that it challenges the view, first, that there is a fixed sexual identity, whether

---

[157] See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, (New York, London: Harvester, Wheatsheaf, 1991); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1990); Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996); Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, (New York, London: New York University Press, 2005); Barbara Creed, 'Queering the Media'; and, Paul Burston and Colin Richardson, (eds.), *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, Gay Men and Popular Culture*, (London, New York: Routledge, 1995).

[158] Burston and Richardson, *A Queer Romance*, p. 1.

[159] Butler, *Gender Trouble.*

[160] Ibid, p. 25.

[161] Jagose, *Queer Theory*, p.3.

heterosexual or homosexual, bisexual or transsexual; and second, that there is a set of fixed gender characteristics, whether masculine or feminine."[162] Therefore, queer views both female and male bodies as "fluid, not fixed ... transgendered and transformative".[163] In *Patchwork Girl* maternal bodies are queered through transformations and renderings of monstrous flesh as well as flows of queer desire.

Maternity, in *Patchwork Girl* is dynamic, fragmented and subversive. Mary Shelley's delight in her creation is often contrasted with Frankenstein's constant spiralling into feelings of abject horror. Frankenstein literally runs away from the monster, thus, avoiding responsibility for his creation. Conversely, Mary Shelley (*Patchwork Girl*) joyfully engages in the "responsible creativity" of birthing and caring for her female monster.[164] While Frankenstein is obsessed with "penetrating the secrets of nature", the character, Mary Shelley appears to be an assistant in the harnessing of forces or capabilities she does not fully understand. For instance, in the division *sewn* Mary Shelley considers whether Patchwork Girl's piecemeal animated self is " more rightfully given, not made; continuous, not interrupted; and subject to divine truth, not the will to expression of its prideful author" (*a journal/sewn*). This quote suggests a bond between Mary Shelley and Patchwork Girl built on autonomy and respect.

Throughout the text, Shelley Jackson implies and states an intimate connection between the characters Mary Shelley and Patchwork Girl. This is depicted in the light of female friendship as well as maternal nurturing and sexual desire. At times Mary Shelley speaks of her creation in terms of awe and fear. In great contrast to Frankenstein, Mary Shelley does not feel abject regard and horror. Mary actually expresses her compassion, love and sexual desire for her creation. Patchwork Girl's huge size is not a cause of alarm for Mary, rather, she views the creature with a maternal pride that her creature is not bound by traditional tropes of femininity. For Patchwork Girl gender is a performance that shifts between naturalized gendered roles. In the section, *a story*, Patchwork Girl reveals that the character Mary Shelley's normative female gendered identity is also a performance of "still-polite manners" (*a story/rethinking/Am I Mary*). However, a bittersweet maternal pride surfaces when

---

[162] Creed, 'Queering the Media', p. 138.

[163] Ibid, p. 142.

[164] Hustis, 'Responsible Creativity', pp. 845-858.

Patchwork Girl asserts her independence and leaves Mary to set off for America and a life of adventure.

Maternity in *Patchwork Girl* reworks the traditional notion of maternal bodies as emptied of desire. In this text, hegemonic heterosexual longing is remediated via the flickering screen of maternity into queer transgressive desiring that traverses the territory of bisexuality and incest. Maternal bodies do not ghost the narrative but instead are fleshy celebrations of desire, sex and the written word. Through the flickering screen of maternity conventional heterosexual maternity is transformed into the monstrous maternal by the exchange of flesh. The print convention of the author as omniscient creator of stories is overturned within the economy of the flickering screen of maternity into a collaboration of author, reader/interactor and character which births Patchwork Girl. Traditional separations of mother and writer are warped via the textual flickering screen of maternity whereby Mary Shelley, Shelley Jackson and countless reader/interactors birth Patchwork Girl. From projections of *Frankenstein* cast on the flickering screen of maternity, the authors produce a tale of a maternal body who refuses to abandon her "hideous progeny". Instead of parental abandonment, *Patchwork Girl* remediates the *Frankenstein* myth so that love and identification with the monstrous creature are projected on the flickering screen of maternity.

Within circuits of maternal desire, motherly pride and queer sexuality exist hypertextually. Mary Shelley (the character) expresses an admiring maternal pride in her creation's spirited enjoyment of life and growing independence. This maternal pride is also hypertexted with a strong sexual desire. For instance, in *appetite*, Mary Shelley writes of the monster's childlike capacity for pleasure and her own sexual fulfilment. Mary Shelley tells of Patchwork Girl's capacious desire

> for food and for experience, it surpasses mine, and so I (would-be parent) find my child leading me in pursuit of the pleasures of knowledge and the knowledge of pleasures I had not imagined. (*a journal/appetite).*

In the mention of pleasures previously unimagined by Mary Shelley's maternal imagination, the usual parent/child relationship is overturned and inflected with a queer sexual desire.

Mary Shelley writes:

> Last night I lay in her arms, my monster, and for the first time laid my hand on her skin ...I touched her skin lightly, and yet she trembled ... It surprised me, then moved me that one so strong should be so susceptible, should tremble and mist at a touch.

Instead of conventional responses of revulsion or horror at the scarred, disparate body, Patchwork Girl's monstrous flesh evokes passion and feelings of identification from Mary Shelley. The thread is continued in the part, *her, me* in the *journal* subdivision:

> Freed, I pressed myself against her with a ravenous heart ... I clung to her with the full extent of my strength and the length of my body, and she returned the embrace ... We breathed each other's breath.

After Mary Shelley expresses her desire for Patchwork Girl, she speaks of her identification with the creature. Shelley writes:

> Her scars lay like living things between us, inscribing themselves in my skin. I thought I too was rent and sewn, that I was both multiply estranged and gathered together in a dynamic union. What divided her, divided me.

It is only after their sexual encounter that Mary Shelley fully understands Patchwork Girl's scars. Mary Shelley says to the monster "I see that your scars not only mark a cut, they also commemorate a joining."

To celebrate their union, Mary Shelley and Patchwork Girl exchange patches of skin. Here, monstrosity and "civilized" flesh swap, combine and transform the mobile bodies. As they consider which patches of skin to exchange, Patchwork Girl states that "the nearest thing to a bit of my own flesh would be this scar, a place where disparate things are joined in a way that was my own" (*story/severance/ join*). Patchwork Girl's scars are crucial elements of her identity and parts of her body from which she derives great pleasure. Mary Shelley takes a patch of skin from her thigh where she perceives it will not be missed. Shelley's acceptance of Patchwork Girl's monstrous skin affirms and displays the author/character's embracing of her inner monstrosity.

There are obvious connections between the scarred monstrous bodies of author/character, creation/lover and the reader/interactor of this hyperfiction. Scars like hypertext links join and separate creating something specific to the body/text in the link. N. Katherine Hayles reminds us that

> The reader inscribes her subjectivity into this text by choosing what links to activate, what scars to trace. Contrary to the dictates of good taste and good writing, the scars/links thus function to join the text with the corporeal body of the reader, which performs the enacted motions that bring text into being as a sequential narrative.[165]

Scars and links allow Patchwork Girl, Mary Shelley and the reader/interactor to explore and depart from dominant discourse while feeling the pleasure of this movement.

From "would-be parent" to lover to monstrous with another to empty-nest mother, the trajectory of desire flickers on the screen of maternity, jumping from Mary Shelley's pleasure in sewing and writing the creature into being to a desire that is both sexual and incestuous. Motherly urges to create changes to a queer desire which morphs through the maternal flickering screen in *Patchwork Girl* into an erotically charged enjoyment of monstrous materiality. Jackson, however, hypertexts this sexual maternal to a motherly pride in Mary Shelley's monstrous offspring's leaving home and embarking upon a road trip to the United States of America.

From queer desire to fleshy monstrosity – stitches, scars and skin

The swapping and stitching of skin which forms tender scars breeds enfleshed monstrosity from queer desire. In *Patchwork Girl* this scarred monstrosity speaks from both the feminized quilting bee and the traditionally male-dominated medical discourse of the surgeon's suturing craft. It is necessary now to hold in a hypertextual moment the images of stitching, quilting and collage discussed in the section, *Stitch Bitches: How to Sew/Write a Mother of a Monster* while I discuss these issues in terms of monstrosity and maternity.

From Jackson's code and associations with domesticity, the flickering screen of maternity forms associations between links and images of quilting stitches, patchwork and scars. These links describe a queer desire and monstrosity of flesh (both broken and bridged). Historically, the quilting involved in producing patchwork items was a means for women, traditionally denied access to male-dominated forms of artistic expression, to produce their own artworks. Jackson grafts this covertly and potentially subversive artform, onto her hypermedia work that overtly disrupts conventional

---

[165] Hayles, 'Flickering Connectivities'.

notions of femininity, maternity and narrative. As well as denoting the feminized arts of patchwork and quilting, stitching also refers to the suturing of a male oriented medical institution. In *Patchwork Girl*, the feminized quilting metaphor blends with the masculinized suturing of western medicine in a hypertextual amalgam of components linked by clicks as well as stitches. Patchwork Girl, the monster, is a creature of disparate parts stitched together by a fictionalization of iconic author, Mary Shelley. *Patchwork Girl*, the fiction, is metaphorically and literally a text in which the author sews together a broad diversity of stories, genres, cultural references and an ever morphing Frankenstein myth into one over-arching narrative. In a movement contrary to this fusion of diverse elements, the hyperfiction also breaks down into smaller units of text and image as a result of the author's use of links. For example, Jackson divides her overarching story of Patchwork Girl into the divisions labelled *a graveyard, a quilt, a story* which, in turn are broken down further into smaller subdivisoins such as the eye, the left leg, and the arm. Thus, the flickering screen of maternity transforms the cosy quilting bee from motherly story into a monstrous pastiche of patches, narrative, stitches and undead flesh.

Shelley Jackson weaves a great tale that strongly intertwines sewing and writing marking these arts as feminine and maternal – both of which are deeply embedded in narratives of the monster in the text. In contrast to the male scientist suturing the male monster together in *Frankenstein*, Patchwork Girl owes her birth to Mary Shelley's sewing and writing efforts. However, the Mary Shelley in *Patchwork Girl* is not an author in the real world but she is a character in the text. In the part *journal/written*, Mary Shelley writes "I made her, writing deep into the night by candlelight until the tiny black letters blurred into stitches and I began to feel that I was sewing a great quilt". The character Mary Shelley again writes in the subdivision *sewn* which is linked to *journal/written*, "I had sewn her, stitching deep into the night by candlelight, until the tiny black stitches wavered into script and I began to feel that I was writing, that this creature I was assembling was a brash attempt to achieve by artificial means the unity of a life-form" (*a journal/sewn)*.

Metaphors of scars, stitches and monstrosity are mobilized within the text in order to dissect and animate discussions regarding narrative, gender and identity. Scars are breaks, ruptures, knittings together made obvious by new flesh eruptions. It is matter that tightly bridges the two severed masses. Scars indicate suffering and disfigurement

in the West but other cultures see scars differently. The scars of Patchwork Girl form her corpus, delineate gaps and jumps in the narrative as well as indicate the monstrousness of the protagonist.

Patchwork Girl is monstrous as a result of her scarred body, the way she is constructed and brought to life as well as her gender. The monster tells the reader/interactor that

> I am like you in most ways. My introductory paragraph comes at the beginning and I have a good head on my shoulders. I have muscle, fat, and a skeleton that keeps me from collapsing into suet. But my real skeleton is made of scars: a web that traverses me in three dimensions. What holds me together is what marks my dispersal. I am most myself in the gaps between my parts, though if they sailed away in all directions in a grisly regatta there would be no thing left here in my place. (*crazy quilt/dispersed).*

The break and reforming of scar tissue and the potential for new meaning evoked by this process is clearly an apt image for hypertext linkages. Academic Erica Seidel writes of *Patchwork Girl* that

> Scars are analogous to hypertextual links. The monster's scars are intimate, integral, the essence of her identity. Similarly, the essence of the hypertext is the linking, the private ways that the author chooses to arrange her piece, and the reader uses to meander through it. Just as the monster finds pleasure and identity in her scars, good hypertext works are defined and distinguished by their unique linking structures. When Shelley and the monster are together intimately, she first understands the significance of the monster's scars ...During this sexual encounter, Shelley genuinely identifies with the scars. "Her scars lay like living things between us, inscribing themselves in my skin. What divided her, divided me." Just as the stitchings of skin unite Shelley and the monster, hypertext links unite author and reader.[166]

Thus, scar tissue and click-linkage bring together, temporarily, Patchwork Girl, Mary Shelley, Shelley Jackson, and reader/interactors in maternal flows of narrative creation that reflect the necessarily fragmented maternity of contemporary times. This enacts a maternal subjectivity of monstrosity that is fractured along many lines of identity, desire and flesh. The projection on the flickering screen of maternity in *Patchwork Girl* flaunts its monstrous flesh and revels in its queer pleasures as it taunts

---

[166] Erica Seidel 'The Hypertextuality of Scars', *Patchwork Girl Comments, Etc*, available at http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/cpace/ht/pg/espatch.html, date accessed 7/7/08.

conventional representations of maternal bodies. And so it gives birth to a maternity fitting for the early twenty-first century.

Monstrous Endings

And so the subversive cybermaternity that flows through the political mother bodies of the Hip Mamas and the humorous unruliness of the Bad Mothers of BMC also charges Patchwork Girl. While BMC and Patchwork Girl are both monstrous cybermaternal texts that reject traditional tropes of motherhood the former are rendered monstrous by the unruly humour of the Bad Mothers and the latter by its hybrid flesh, hypertext and association with Frankenstein. Like Frankenstein, Patchwork Girl has become a canonical text. However, the latter makes the social, political and cultural threats to hegemonic norms more explicit than the former text by infusing the hyperfiction with a monstrous maternal aesthetic of flickering signification. Both Frankenstein's monster and Patchwork Girl are monstrous reproductions. Both are articulate hybrids of meanings. Frankenstein's monster, however, is contained within masculine circuits of meaning, riddled with rage at his father's abandonment as well as the limitations imposed on him. He responds violently to human expressions of horror at his appearance. Conversely, Patchwork Girl is located securely in the matrix of a queer maternal love and desire. She embraces her monstrosity with enjoyment, practicality, energy and humour. Frankenstein's monster is a constantly morphing myth of reproduction, technology and humanity. Patchwork Girl represents the feminized, techno-charged, wayward monstrous narrative of fragmented maternity in the early twenty-first century.

Chapter 5

Slippery Mutants Perform and Wink at Maternal Insurrection: The Monstrous Cute of Patricia Piccinini's Creatures.

From explorations of flows of cyber-maternity throughout websites and a CD Rom, my project now shifts to a consideration of artworks and gallery space as cyber-domains. To accomplish this third movement from the first obvious cyber-space of the website and the second less apparently cyber-realm of the CD Rom, I, again, rely upon Christine Hine's concept of cyber(cultural)space as culture and artefact as well as David Bell's notion of this domain as "lived culture" which possesses "material, symbolic and experiential dimensions".[1] In this chapter I extend the understanding of cyber(cultural)space that includes websites and hypertext CDs to also encompass art galleries that display techno-artworks. Cyber(cultural)space infiltrates galleries displaying art that deals with topics concerning contemporary techno-science and/or draws upon the capabilities and qualities of new technologies to construct the artworks. The work of internationally renowned Australian artist Patricia Piccinini dramatically combines narratives of techno-science and maternity in her artwork. Due to this combination of maternal bodies and technological forces, I have chosen to focus on Piccinini's artwork in this chapter. I find her techno-mother figures loaded with possibilities, intriguing and disturbing.

Piccinini is a popular and critically acclaimed Australian artist whose work is widely exhibited and reviewed. Her work is located within the domain of multi-media art that literally uses and also draws upon narratives of new technologies. Since the mid-1990s, Piccinini has produced sculptures, film clips and photographs that proudly display hyper-real mutants and cyborgean blendings of animal/machine/human bodies. Her artwork is inspired by and displays strong maternal influences and figures. These mother bodies are often formed from intersections of narratives of technology, science, and maternal flesh that speak of the implications of intermeshings of these discourses. I fondly think of these creatures as *slippery mutants* that slyly wink at discourses of technology and maternity.

---

[1] Christine Hine, Virtual Ethnography, (London: Sage, 2000) and David Bell, *An Introduction to Cybercultures*, (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 2.

Curator and art critic Juliana Engberg describes Patricia Piccinini as a twenty-first century Mary Shelley "preoccupied with and inspired by the bioethics of her time and the debates they continue to generate ... Like Shelley, her work is a plea for humanity in the inevitable progress towards man-made life forms. And like Frankenstein's monster, Piccinini's creations need empathy to survive."[2] Unlike Frankenstein, however, Piccinini embraces her monstrous creations in a similar way to Shelley Jackson's character Mary Shelley's love for and embrace of Patchwork Girl. Engberg's comments position Piccinini as iconic, cutting edge and a somewhat Romantic figure – a hip techno-artist with the unmistakable aroma of the nineteenth century awe of scientific discoveries that still seems to pervade contemporary western culture. Piccinini is constructed and presents herself in various media as the motherless artist who gives birth to techno-maternal monsters. Despite her immersion in narratives of maternity, however, the strands of the maternal that inform and shape her work are not critically examined in scholarly and mainstream publications.

I first encountered Piccinini's work when I was Internet surfing and found images of the *Truck Babies* installation. The space of the computer screen seems an appropriate medium for Piccinini's objects which are enmeshed in techno-discourses and digital practices. They also literally flesh out art gallery spaces with narratives of technoscience and biology as the hybrid creatures are both constructed from and raise questions about the use and effects of a number of new technologies. Cyber(cultural)space, therefore, flows through the gallery from two main sources – the technoscience that inspires the artist and the new technologies that are literally used in the construction of the creatures. Piccinini's mutants are also imbued with strong resonances of the maternal. Piccinini states that "I see my works as my children and I want what is best for them".[3] From monstrous intermeshings of technology and maternity in Piccinini's work, the cyber(cultural)space of the gallery is charged with the potential to open up discussion and affective responses about a range of issues concerning culture and nature. Three of her works in particular combine technological and maternal forces,, *The Young Family, Still Life With Stem Cells* and *Truck Babies.* I

---

2 Rebecca Lancashire, "Piccinini's Monsters." *The Age*, 25 May, 2001, Extra, p. 3.

3 Megan J. Doll, 'Of Mutants and Malaise: The Artistic Experiments of Patricia Piccinini', *NY Arts Magazine*, available at http://nyartsmagazine.com/bbs4/messages/508.html, 2003, date accessed 2/10/03.

saw these works at Piccinini's *Retrospectology* exhibition, December 2002-March 2003, at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA) in Melbourne.

During my viewings of the exhibition in February 2003 I was fascinated by the slippery mutants. I felt a pull towards the objects as the tactile sensuousness of the creatures invited touch. The solidified metallic waves that formed the *Car Nuggets* and the buttock-like pastel curves of the *Truck Babies* exerted an appeal of gleamingly fresh power and sensuous symmetry. I felt as if I could join the figure of the little girl staring adoringly at the lumps of flesh gambolling around in *Still Life With Stem Cells* and gently stroke their skin-like texture. The strongest desiring force I experienced was to touch the silicone creatures that comprised *The Young Family*: conglomerate monstrous beings composed of aspects of pig, dog, ape and human. In this work, the mother creature reclines, exhausted after giving birth, and suckles three of her four offspring.

I saw that many other people experienced similar desires as numerous visitors attempted to touch the objects. These attempts at physical connection with the monstrous bodies, however, were stopped by vigilant gallery guides. The reason given for the ban on viewer contact with the artworks was that they were constructed using silicone which discolours when it is repeatedly touched. So, the invitation to touch suggested by the tactile sensuousness of the works is subverted at the level of production by the potential discoloration of the material used. Piccinini's blocking of interactivity is curious especially as the work itself invites tactile participation in such a clear manner and the artist has been photographed cradling one of the pups on the cover of *The Weekend Australian Magazine*.[4] Sensuous engagement with the works is also limited by the objects being displayed on the Internet, especially if that is the viewers' only means of accessing the work. Perhaps the blocking of tactile response in the gallery is the result of financial concerns about replacing the work and the issue of artistic control. These thoughts about the institutionally enforced closure on engagement with the art works by the gallery guides lead me to consider the ways in which this closure is mirrored in some of the responses to Piccinini's work.

---

[4] Katrina Strickland. 'Patricia's Baby: The darling of Australian Art, Patricia Piccinini, Shows her Lovable Mutants to the World', *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, May 3-4, 2003, 14-17.

Piccinini constructs artworks of technoculture and 'natureculture'.[5] Her work articulates and is articulated by narratives concerning current debate into embryonic stem cell (ESC) research, cloning and genetic engineering. Piccinini often draws upon narratives of biotechnological innovations that increasingly produce hybrid entities previously considered to be impossible such as sheep which possess human genes.[6] Contemporary discussions concerning ESC research, cloning and genetic engineering in both academic and popular forums have escalated in intensity so that they now occupy public space in the same way that topics such as human evolution and global climate change have been and are still strongly contested issues.[7] The debates regarding biotechnology encompass a complex range of sometimes contradictory emotions and desires.[8] Responses to the discussions include anxiety about maintaining boundaries of human/other, fear of technoscientific experimentation spiralling out of control, pride and awe at biotechnological advances as well as hope for improved health and living conditions for humans.[9]

Patricia Piccinini's artworks are corporealizations of tensions between the components of traditionally binarized pairs such as nature/culture, feminine/masculine, white/non-white, middle-class/working class and maternal bodies/technobodies. I investigate the ways in which Piccinini's enfleshments of conventionally dichotomized thought and contemporary debate concerning motherhood work within hypertextual economies in order to ask whether and how they challenge or reinstate traditional western tropes of maternal bodies. But how to unpack this hypertexty engagement with narratives of maternity whose location in contemporary debate concerning new technologies, maps the virtually sexless traditional maternal body onto the terrain of the decidedly sexy techno-body? In order to explore the hypertexted streams of meanings that intertwine narratives of maternal bodies and technologies in her artwork I first outline a brief biography of Piccinini and

---

5 Donna Haraway. "Speculative Fabulations for Technoculture's Generations: Taking Care of Unexpected Country." *Patricia Piccinini*, 2007, available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/, date accessed 7/7/08.

6 Sarah Franklin, 'Drawing the Line at Not-Fully-Human: What We Already Know', *The American Journal of Bioethics*, Volume 3, No. 3, 2003, pp. 25-27.

7 Nancy Gibbs, 'Stem Cells: The Hope and the Hype', *Time Magazine*, available at http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1220538,00.html, posted Sunday July 30th, 2006.

8 Franklin, 'Drawing the Line at Not-Fully-Human', p. 25.

9 Ibid, p.25.

give an account of her construction as a popular phenomenon or what I call a Media Madonna – a celebrity or person constructed as maternal who is greatly celebrated by mainstream media.

As Piccinini's own accounts of her work are lauded and valorised in popular and academic writings as the sole interpretation of the objects, I examine closely her own stories. This is not to elevate authorial intention above other means of reading the work but to argue that it is "one interpretation among many, no more or less valid *per se* than that of the audience".[10] In this particular reading, Piccinini's stories of artistic intention intersect with flows of personal, cultural, national and international desires. These narratives also work towards the construction of the artist as a Media Madonna. Media stories and reviews foreground the installations' aesthetic of cute abjection and appealing monstrosity and tend to focus discussion of the artworks on conventional narratives of family and technological innovation rather than critical debate about minglings of technology and biology.

After this introduction to Piccinini, I discuss the Hybrid Media art in which her work is located. The term "Hybrid Media" moves some way towards capturing the varied meldings of art and technologies that some contemporary artists employ in their paintings, photography, sculptures and/or installations. The artworks focused on in this chapter are *The Young Family*, *Still Life With Stem Cells*, and *Truck Babies.*[11] I focus on these pieces as they are deeply immersed in flows of the maternal as well as the technological and I was also able to view them a number of times in Piccinini's *Restrospectology* exhibition.[12] I consider how flows of maternity and technology thread through these installations, all of which feature monstrosity and maternal bodies. My critique develops an interpretation drawing on feminist theories about maternity and technology as well as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of

---

[10] Will Brooker, "Readings of Racism: Interpretation, Stereotyping and The Phantom Menace, *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2001, pp. 15-32, p. 21.

[11] Images of Patricia Piccinini's artworks are available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/ Images of *The Young Family* and *Still Life With Stem Cells* are available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/wearefamily/index.php Images of *The Truck Babies* are available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/essay.php?id=26

[12] Patricia Piccinini, *Retrospectology: the World According to Patricia Piccinini*, 21/12/2002 – 2/3/2003, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, (ACCA), Sturt Street, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

"becoming".[13] I identify one particular response to Piccinini's work, which I call "monstrous cute", and I consider the implications and politics of this reading practice.[14] Throughout the chapter I draw upon David Bell's concept of the hypertextual moment derived from his work concerning the constantly expanding field of cyberculture studies.[15] This moment refuses to concentrate on a single fixed focus. Instead, in the hypertextual moment, readings offer more than one, indeed sometimes contradictory, perspective. Bell's notion of the hypertextual moment is useful to my argument as it facilitates identification and description of the flickering intersections of technologies and maternity within Piccinini's work. Utilization of the hypertextual moment enables my investigation of Piccinini's creatures to hold the complexities and contradictions of the work together as I examine the ways in which the artist *both* overturns *and* celebrates narratives of convention. The hypertextual moment is an appropriate strategy to use in discussions of Piccinini's ouvre as it aptly evokes the multiplicity and hypertext linking of cyber(cultural)space, the domain in which the artist's blendings of technology, nature and culture are situated.

Media Madonna: Artist Patricia Piccinini Gives Good Face

In her description of Piccinini as a modern Mary Shelley, Juliana Engberg sums up the way in which the Australian artist is generally represented in a variety of texts. Both author and artist are so closely identified with their work that it appears as if the latter can only be discussed with regard to the former. Considering Piccinini in terms of Roland Bathes' famous phrase, this "author" is not dead, she's too busy figuring out her next collaborative project and doing press with her husband.[16] Piccinini is constructed by the popular press, government discourse, public response and academic writings as yet another iconic figure: the Madonna. One reviewer aptly sums up this desire to construct the artist as iconic mother figure: "Piccinini's face has a luminous, Madonna-like quality and she looks positively maternal when she's talking about her

---

[13] Regarding the notion of "becoming" see Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Trans. Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 239-242.

[14] Anitra Goriss-Hunter, 'Slippery Mutants Perform and Wink At Maternal Insurrections: Patricia Piccinini's Monstrous Cute', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 18, 4 (2004): 541-553.

[15] David Bell, *An Introduction to Cybercultures*, (London, New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 2.

[16] Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, translated by Stephen Heath, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

latest creation" (Figures 15, 16 and 17, pp 232 -234).[17] Accorded the type of sex appeal approaching that of the contemporary celebrity, Madonna, and the maternal appeal of the religious icon of motherhood, Piccinini is constructed by the media as an object of hip techno(cyber)-maternity that sculpts undiscovered truths about current technological debates from a perspective of motherly nurturance. This view is certainly one hyperlink of interpretation. I argue that in another hypertextual moment, Piccinini's current position as a Media Madonna closes down debate about the implications of scientific and technological advancements in a morass of cute-appeal and sentimental narratives of a conventional maternity.

Patricia Piccinini's biographical details are used by the popular press as material for official constructions of the artist as a media phenonomena – a Media Madonna. She is described as a mother-less artist who, longing for the deceased mother, imbues her work with shades of the maternal. Born in 1965 in Sierra Leone Piccinini and her family moved to Australia in the 1970s. In *The Weekend Australian*'s article about Piccinini, entitled, 'Mother Love', Katrina Strickland relates the artist's strong sense of being a migrant and feelings of alienation.[18] Strickland writes "with no aunts, uncles and cousins to visit, few dark-eyed people on the streets of Perth and no capsicum on the supermarket shelves, a tearful Piccinini asked her father when they were going home. 'He had to tell me we're not going home. This is home.'"[19] Alongside this sense of remaining outside cultural norms, Piccinini expresses the need to pursue a career that would easily support herself in contrast to the financial and cultural struggles experienced by her family in Australia. In order to achieve this accomplishment, both Patricia and her sister prepared for "sensible" careers: the latter as a nurse, the former completing a Bachelor of Economics.

---

[17] Rebecca Lancashire, 'Piccinini's Monsters', *The Age*, Extra, Saturday 26th May, 2001, p. 3.

Figure 15: Media Madonna, sourced from *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, May 2-4, 2003, cover.

Figure 16: Only a mother could love, sourced from *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, May 2-4, 2003, p 14.

Figure 17: Madonna and Child, sourced from *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, May 2-4, 2003, p 15.

[18] Katrina Strickland, 'Mother Love', *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, May 2-4, 2003, pp. 14-17.

[19] Katrina Strickland, 'Mother Love', *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, p. 14.

Pages 232-234 have been removed for copyright or proprietary reasons.

Figure 15: Media Madonna, sourced from The Weekend Australian Magazine, May 2-4, 2003, cover.

Figure 16: Only a mother could love, sourced from The Weekend Australian Magazine, May 2-4, 2003, p 14.

Figure 17: Madonna and Child, sourced from The Weekend Australian Magazine, May 2-4, 2003, p 15.

From descriptions of Piccinini's difficulties as a migrant related in articles, interviews, and online publications, her official biography outlines her move from a conventional career path in economics to the financially uncertain world of art in terms of artistic compulsion. Piccinini enrolled at the Victorian College of Arts to pursue studies in the area of painting. Remembering the many hours spent in The Basement Project Gallery, an artist initiative she co-founded, Piccinini states "I sat in this gallery and earned very little money while I did it – literally my sister used to send me $20 so I could go and have cappucinos ... I gave up a lot in terms of lifestyle to do it".[20] Piccinini's sister, Paula, describes Patricia's involvement with art as "a vocation ...it's life itself, like breathing."[21] During her time at art school she met her future husband and chief collaborator, Peter Hennessey, a student of architecture. Piccinini's sister describes Hennessey's role in the collaborative team in these terms: " Patricia comes up with the ideas ... and then she'll talk them through with Peter. He's the technical backbone because he has that knowledge."[22] It is ironic that an artist so closely associated with producing works of techno-culture relies upon the technological expertise of others. And it raises the question of how much Hennessey and the other unnamed collaborators influence the creation of the artwork for which Piccinini vaguely acknowledges assistance but basically assumes sole credit.

Patricia Piccinini generally produces the initial sketches from which her pieces are built and she works closely with the people involved with the construction of her objects. *Car Nuggets*, *Truck Babies* and *Plasticology* are examples of this practice. Her art work, *The Young Family* was conceptually Piccinini's work but the initial sketches were done by another artist. Piccinini acknowledges that she works within a collaborative framework utilizing the skills of other artists and artisans. However, she refuses to name all of these people who are essentially her co-workers as she, in the words of the *Retrospectology* gallery guides "wants to keep some mystery about her work".[23] This raises questions about the acknowledgement of workers who assist in the completion of an art project regarding the input that they have concerning the piece. Although art is process, form and culture it is also a material artefact produced

---

[20] Strickland, 'Mother Love', p. 16.

[21] Strickland, 'Mother Love', p. 16.

[22] Strickland, 'Mother Love', p. 16.

by people. Just as contemporary films publish extensive lists of those who contributed to the text, it is possible and necessary for Piccinini to openly credit all of her collaborators.

Piccinini's fascination with science and new technologies, crucial elements of her work, has evolved perhaps partly as a result of her involvement with the more technologically proficient Hennessey as well as in response to her mother's stomach cancer. Interviews and news reports of Piccinini's art frequently mention her mother's illness and eventual death from cancer.[24] Piccinini was thirteen when her mother was first diagnosed with cancer and twenty-six when she died.[25] The artist states that in the last stages of her mother's cancer she hoped that science would find a cure for the disease.[26] It is significant to note that technological change and innovation as well as biological processes feature in Piccinini's hoping for a cure for her mother's cancer and also in her subsequent artwork. The death of her mother is also proposed as the catalyst for Piccinini's often-remarked upon maternal orientations and the frequency of the emergence of this theme in her work.[27] Although she makes only a few brief references to having her own biological children and breastfeeding, narratives of Piccinini as the conventional mother figure abound.[28] For instance, art critic Katrina

---

[23] Patricia Piccinini, *Retrospectology: the World According to Patricia Piccinini*, 21/12/2002 – 2/3/2003, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, (ACCA), Sturt Street, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

[24] Katrina Strickland, 'Mother Love', *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, p. 17. See also Rachel Kent, 'Fast Forward: Accelerated Evolution.' *Call of the Wild (Catalogue)* 200, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/essay.php?id=21, 2002, date accessed 4/6/08.

[25] Katrina Strickland, 'Mother Love', *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, p. 17. See also Rachel Kent, 'Fast Forward: Accelerated Evolution', available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/essay.php?id=21, 2002, *Call of the Wild (Catalogue),* Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, date accessed 4/6/08

[26] Katrina Strickland, 'Mother Love', *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, p. 17. See also Rachel Kent, 'Fast Forward: Accelerated Evolution', available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/essay.php?id=21, 2002, *Call of the Wild (Catalogue),* Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, date accessed 4/6/08. Laura Fernandez Orgaz, 'The Naturally Artificial World: A Conversation Between Patricia Piccinini and Laura Fernandez Orgaz', Reproduced with permission from the catalogue for the exhibition "Tender Creatures" at Artium, Spain, 2007, available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/, date accessed 22/1/08.

[27] Katrina Strickland, 'Mother Love', *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, p. 17

[28] See Patricia Piccinini, 'Patricia Piccinini: Unbreaking Eggs', Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, September 2005, available at http://www.kunstaspekte.de/index.php?tid=17135&action=termin, date accessed 30/5/09 and Laura Fernandex Orgaz and Patricia Piccinini, 'The Naturally Artificial World',

Strickland writes "Those who have lost a mother at a young age often have fiercely maternal instincts, and Piccinini is no exception ... These nurturing instincts infuse Piccinini's work, the message being that we should embrace, not reject, the flawed products of science ."[29]

Piccinini's success as an artist and the construction of her as Media Madonna is also dependent on her own statements and reactions to her work that stress her imbrication in discourses of conventional maternity: nurturing, accepting, loving and centred on emotions. The artist comments that "There are conceptual and political issues that underlie all of my work, but the core of it is emotional and narrative."[30] Art critic Peter Hill writes of the significance that Piccinini attaches to her artworks stating that "she spoke with genuine affection about her various creations, almost as if they were her children".[31] Echoing these sentiments, Melbourne art dealer, Jan Minchin claims that Piccinini "loves her creatures ... She brought them into the world and she's very, very attached to them."[32]

Piccinini Makes Babies for New(ish) Hybrid Media Art

The glossily appealing artwork of Patricia Piccinini is firmly located within the domain of what is currently called New or Hybrid Media art. A variety of terms such as New Media, Intermedia, Multimedia and Hybrid Media have been used to refer to an increasing technologization of contemporary art. Artists, art critics, academics and

---

Patricia Piccinini's Website, reproduced with permission from the catalogue for the exhibition "Tender Creatures" at Artium, Spain, available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/essay.php?id=29, date accessed 30/5/09.

29 Katrina Strickland, 'Mother Love', *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, p. 17. Jackie Randles, 'Hybrid Life: the art of Patricia Piccinini', St James Ethics Centre, article published in *Living Ethics*, Iss. 57, Spring 2004, available at http://www.ethics.org.au/about-ethics/ethics-centre-articles/ethics-subjects/science/article-0392.html, date accessed 21/8/04.'Biography', *Heterosis Catalogue*, Drome, 2002, available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/essay.php?id=2, date accessed 20/1/03. 'Big Mother', 2005, Elizabeth A. Sackler, Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum website, available at https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist_art_base/gallery/piccinini.php?i=1002, date accessed 3/5/08.

30 Orgaz, 'The Naturally Artificial World', available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/, date accessed 22/1/08.

31 Peter Hill, ''Patricia Piccinini', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2003, available at http://www.superfictions.com/elgrecol/PatriciaPiccinini.htm, date accessed 5/12/2005.

32 Katrina Strickland, 'Mother Love', *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, p. 17.

journalists write of this phenomena as an "e-volution" in art.[33] The terminology that refers to contemporary digitally-informed art changes almost as rapidly as the technological advances that inform the art. This is evident in the quick-fire morphing of terminology from "electronic art" to "digital media" to the current "New Media".

In this chapter the terms New Media and Hybrid Media art are used interchangeably to refer to contemporary art that utilizes and/or draws on new technologies in its challenging of boundaries and borders. New Media is a broad term that refers to art derived from and/or dealing with issues relevant to technologies prevalent in use from the middle of the twentieth century.[34] An artwork that is displayed by one or more new technolog(ies) is also considered to be included within the notion of New Media. Academic Terry Flew defines New Media art forms as always including various combinations of "the three Cs: computing, communication and content".[35] As critic, Kathy Cleland argues, "Indeed, it is the very *convergence* of audio-visual, computing and communication technologies that simultaneously defines this area and enables and encourages the permeability of boundaries and resultant hybrid practice."[36] New Media art exists within the rhizomatic cybercultural space of digital and computer technologies, the screen-dominated domain of current popular culture. It is replete with flickering significations of humanity and technology and asks the globally significant question, how do we describe the limits and bounds of machines, human beings and their environments in the twenty-first century? Therefore, science, new technologies, imaginative play and debate about the nature of humanity are the crucial components of contemporary New Media art.

Cleland sums up Hybrid Media art as being the art form of the twenty-first century that is firmly imbricated in both "high" and "low" cultural forms of artistic expression. She posits that

> Just as cinema and television were the defining cultural forms for the twentieth century, new media – the 'new kid' on the block in the art world – is emerging from an accelerated adolescence, to stand centre stage in the

---

[33] Kathy Cleland, 'The E-volution of new media art', *Artlink*, Vol 21, no. 3, 2001, pp.12-13.

[34] Marnie-Anne Snow, Amy Robinson, Heike Herrling, 'New Media Art', M/Cyclopedia of New Media, available at http://wiki.media-culture.org.au/index.php/New_Media_Art, October 2005, date accessed 2/10/08.

[35] Terry Flew, *New Media: An Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 2.

[36] Cleland, 'The e-volution of new media art', p. 12.

international art arena in the twenty-first century bridging the gulf of popular screen culture and the fine arts.[37]

New Media art describes and draws upon a growing contemporary romance with accessible, affordable and interactive digital media like iTunes and YouTube. In contrast to the exorbitant production costs of the media of film and television, multimedia technologies are relatively "user-friendly" for artists individually or collectively as they provide a plethora of opportunities and tools such as enormous ranges of computer software to assist in the creation of artwork. An installation could focus on one modality or combinations of the following - digitally designed prints and/or sculptures, websites, sculptures, computer programs, and CD Roms. Reading the glowing descriptions and praise for the work of New Media artists such as Piccinini in various newspapers, art journals and websites reveals the critical acclaim and growing popularity of Hybrid Media works nationally and internationally.[38]

Alongside accessibility and versatility, interactivity is another trait that often animates multimedia art forms. Flouting the convention of artworks being solely visual rather than tactile creations, Hybrid Media art tends to invite the gaze and the touch of viewers who also become participants in the processes of art. While audience participation is historically integral to some strands of the performing arts, the capabilities of new technologies open up greater space in which to experiment with

---

[37] Cleland, 'The e-volution of new media art', p. 12

[38] See The Web site for the Biennale of Electronic Arts, Perth, 2007, available at http://www.beap.org/, date accessed 2/6/08. Saul Eslake, (chief economist of the Australia and New Zealand Banking Group and Chairperson of the Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board), 'Address to a Reception hosted by the Australian Business Arts Foundation and the Australian Institute of Company Directors', Tuesday 17th June, 2008, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, available at http://www.abaf.org.au/files/Saul_Eslake_AICD_Perth_17_6_08.pdf, date accessed 4/7/08. See the report on Australian hybrid media artists in the following article from the Multimedia Arts Asia Pacific (MAAP) website, 'See MAAP in Beijing Olympics Cultural Project', *Synthetic Times: Media Art China 2008*, 16th May 2008, available at http://www.maap.org.au/, date accessed 10/7/08. Thom Cookes, 'Multimedia Spawns Art', *The Age*, Wednesday 12 July, 1995, p. 21. Rachel White, 'Artists Embrace New Media', Australian Government, Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, available at http://www.arts.gov.au/publications/arts_news/artbeat/artbeat_previous_editions/artbeat_spring_2007/artists_embrace_new_media, Spring 2007, date accessed 1/7/08. Mark Pennings, 'Enchantment, Technoscience and Desire', *Art and Australia*, Vol 37, no. 4, 2000, pp. 556-564. Robert Nelson, 'Clever Technology, Serious Questions', *The Age*, Saturday, January 4, 2003, Arts 17. Katrina Strickland, 'Mother Love', *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, p. 17. Rebecca Lancashire, 'Piccinini's Monsters', *The Age*, Extra, Saturday 26th May, 2001, p. 3.

artist/viewer/artwork interaction and the innovative objects that may be created from these connections. Interactivity varies in these artworks from the clicked-on selection of chaotic assemblages of flesh and word in Linda Dement's *Cyberflesh Girlmonster*, to the online community of digital art and literature of the deviantART Web site.[39] Other artists experiment with movement and voice activated systems as the means of further dissolving boundaries between artmaker and artviewer.[40] Although the sensuous curves, glossy finishes and tantalizing intersections of technology and maternity invite the viewer to touch, Piccinini discourages physical interaction with her artwork.

While multimedia art disrupts boundaries between conventional static art and its audience, I draw on media artist, Ian Haig's critiques to argue that the hype about the possibilities of Hybrid Media art at times exceeds the reality of exhibits or installations.[41] It is important to note that art is necessarily participatory and interactive – New Media art underlines this process in which viewer/interactor or vuser[42] and artwork form connections. Ian Haig contends that the problems with interactive Hybrid Media art revolve around ensuring functionality for the exhibit, an over-reliance on audience interaction and a false sense of choice. Haig states that Hybrid Media art as an artform depends heavily on the functioning of new technologies throughout its time in the gallery: "there is nothing more boring than a bunch of crashed computers at an interactive art exhibit".[43] Furthermore, he argues that interactivity is often substituted for artistic engagement with issues and

---

[39] Angelo Sotira, CEO, *deviantART*, founded April 2000, available at http://www.deviantart.com/#, date accessed 1/2/2008.

[40] Amy Robinson, 'New Media Art – Interactive Art', *M/Cyclopedia of New Media*, available at http://wiki.media-culture.org.au/index.php/New_Media_Art_-_Interactive_Art, October 2005, date accessed 2/10/08.

[41] Cleland, 'The e-volution of new media art', pp. 12-13. 'See MAAP in Beijing Olympics Cultural Project', *Synthetic Times: Media Art China 2008*, 16th May 2008, available at http://www.maap.org.au/, date accessed 10/7/08. Thom Cookes, 'Multimedia spawns art', *The Age*, Wednesday 12 July, 1995, p. 21. Rachel White, 'Artists Embrace New Media', Australian Government, Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, available at http://www.arts.gov.au/publications/arts_news/artbeat/artbeat_previous_editions/artbeat_spring_2007/artists_embrace_new_media, Spring 2007, date accessed 1/7/08. Mark Pennings, 'Enchantment, Technoscience and Desire', *Art and Australia*, Vol 37, no. 4, 2000, pp. 556-564.

[42] Teri Hoskin, 'Bill Seaman; Red Dice/Des Chiffres' *Photofile - Tekne* volume 60, August 2000, p. 53.

[43] Ian Haig, 'Interactive Refrigerator Art', *Photofile* 68, February-March, 2003.

processes.[44] Also, Haig claims that the element of choice in interactive art is not the liberatory feature that enables viewer/interactors to escape from conventional notions of passively gazing at the artwork to actively participating in the construction of meanings. Haig writes that "Interactive artists will tell you that it's all about choice, but really it isn't. It's about an illusion of choice where users are not liberated in some decision-making process, but constrained by a set of predetermined outcomes".[45]

The hype encircling hybrid media is also fuelled by government support and expectations that any success enjoyed by Australian multimedia artists will reflect favourably on the country that supported the "cutting edge" artworks.[46] Curator of the State Library of Victoria, Clare Williamson posits that this drive to define Australian artists as technological and internationally competitive is the result of a move from the conceptualization of Australian identity as rural and technologically innocent to a national image of citizens who are urban and skilled in the useage of technologies.[47] Government funding provides the material support necessary for artists to produce their work, imparts a certain official authority to the work produced and the artist him/herself and enables the circulation of artwork beyond a localised sphere. A number of Australian government initiatives, collectively titled 'Creative Nation', promoting multimedia art were instigated by the former Labor government in the early to mid 1990s.[48] Fellowships granted through the New Media Arts Fund; Australia Council funding for art projects implicated with new technologies; and Australian Film Commission (AFC) initiatives like Web-focused Stuff Art (1998-2000) provided financial assistance, exhibition space and promotional opportunities for multimedia artists.[49] Many art pieces have been created as a direct result of the financial support

---

[44] Haig, 'Interactive Refrigerator Art.'

[45] Ibid.

[46] Julianne Pierce, Australian New Media: an Active Circuit, *Artlink,* Vol 21, no. 3, 2001, pp. 12-14, p. 14

[47] Clare Williamson, 'Digitalis Australis: The Recent Hybrid in Australian Photography', *History of Photography*, Vol 23, no. 2, Summer, 1999, pp. 107-113, p. 107.

[48] Chris Nash and Shirley Alexander, 'The Creative Nation Cultural Policy: Will it play in Australia Street?', Proceedings of the Australian Unix and Open Systems Users Group [AUUG] and Asia-Pacific World Wide Web '95 Conference and Exhibition, Friday 21st May, 2004, available at http://www.csu.edu.au/special/conference/apwww95/papers95/cnash/cnash.html, date accessed 30/5/09.

[49] Clare Williamson, 'Digitalis Australis: The Recent Hybrid in Australian Photography', *History of Photography*, Vol 23, no. 2, Summer, 1999, pp. 107-113. p. 107.

available to Hybrid Media artists, a number of which have become major Australian New Media artworks.[50]

Patricia Piccinini stands in the midst of these local and national discourses and desires to produce internationally renowned techno-artists. Her success and position as iconic and innovative artist is dependent upon the support of the public, the popular press, and the Australian Government at both federal and state levels. Piccinini's reputation as "The darling of Australian Art" is nationally sanctioned.[51] She has received substantial financial remuneration from government organisations and the list of the awards and grants bestowed upon her is impressive.[52] In particular, financial support from the Australia Council and Arts Victoria has played a significant role in enabling Piccinini to consolidate her art practices in Australia as well as providing a solid basis for the extension of her work to international markets.

With an appeal based in a matrix of contradictions, Piccinini's popularity is enmeshed with the delineation of her own image as an artist inspired by current bioethical issues who creates from a conventional maternal ethic of nurturing and "unconditional love".[53] Piccinini claims "One of the points of my work is that we now know that we all came from the same genetic material ... So if we are family .... we actually have a duty to care. We created them [results of scientific experiments], so we've got to look after them."[54] "She never makes work that she doesn't empathise

---

[50] *OzArts*, Australia Council for the Arts, available at http://www.ozarts.com.au/home, date accessed 5/6/09.

[51] For example, the cover of *The Weekend Australian Magazine* May 3-4, 2003 displays an image of Piccinini and one of the Young Family pups as it proclaims "Patricia's Baby: The darling of Australian art, Patricia Piccinini, shows her lovable mutants to the world".

[52] The awards are as follows - Victorian College of the Arts, Theodore Urbach Award (1989 and 1990); Victorian College of the Arts, Christopher James Blyth Memorial Award (1991); C.A.T Digital Imaging Award (1995); Arts Victoria, Project grant (1996); A.F.C, Project Grant (1996); Arts 21, International Cultural Exchange Program (1997); Australia Council, Project grant (1997); Australia Council, Residency, Japan (1998); Arts Victoria, Arts Development grant (1999); Australia Council, New Media Fellowship (2000); and, Progressive Business Award, Victorian Premier Award (2005). Information taken from 'Patricia Piccinini, Artist Profile', Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, Australia, available at http://www.roslynoxley9.com.au/artists/31/Patricia_Piccinini/profile/, date accessed 2/7/08.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Patricia Piccinini, 'Public Lecture – Tokyo Art University', Faculty of Fine Arts, National University of Fine Arts and Music, December 8th 2003, available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/, date accessed 7/9/05.

with," Peter Hennessey states.[55] "She can't understand how anyone could think SO2 [animal creation called siren mole] wasn't beautiful' he says fondly. It's a face only a mother could love."[56] Piccinini comments on her work *Bodyguard* [a genetically engineered protector for an endangered species] "The ethical environmental issues are interesting but they are just background. More interesting for me is the possibility of the unpredictable relationship between ... them and us."[57]

Using a variety of new technologies to produce work that is a material consideration of various cultural narratives of techno-science and nature, Piccinini is positioned as a contemporary artist par excellence, a leader positioned at the cutting edge of Australian and international art practice. Juliana Engberg describes Piccinini as "an artist of and for our time".[58] Effortlessly stylish, the artist is often displayed alongside her work in many photographs that are featured in leading national newspapers such as *The Age* and *The Australian*. Katrina Strickland states in her feature article in the *Weekend Australian* that "It doesn't hurt that she's (Piccinini) gorgeous-looking, either – how the media loves that".[59] However, the potential for Piccinini to assume the position of "media darling" in which media-induced fame takes precedence over art is critiqued by art critic Susan McCulloch. "My concern," McCulloch states, "is that she is becoming one of those personality artists ... she's being thrust into that position like the Young Brit artists, like Tracey Emin, and ... when it becomes more about the artist than the artwork then it's hard to retain your focus, and your art often suffers."[60]

Nonetheless, the trend towards constructing Piccinini as a celebrity artist continues. Piccinini's status, however, as an artist concerned with the intellectual investigation and enfleshments of narratives of new technologies, biology, femininity and culture is consolidated in her inclusion in the number of artists who exhibit at the American Museum, the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art and in some

---

[55] Rebecca Lancashire, 'Piccinini's Monsters', *The Age*, 26 May, 2001, p. 3. (Extra).

[56] Rebecca Lancashire, 'Piccinini's Monsters', *The Age*, 26 May, 2001, p. 3. (Extra).

[57] Patricia Piccinini, *Bodyguard*, Artist Statement for Robert Miller Gallery, NYC, 2004, available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/, date accessed 24/10/2005.

[58] Strickland, 'Mother Love', 2003, p. 16.

[59] Strickland, 'Mother Love', 2003, p. 16.

[60] Strickland, 'Mother Love', 2003, p. 16.

academic discussions of her artwork.[61] The artist's exhibition in the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center, a renowned feminist art gallery foregrounds some of the dominant concerns of her work that focus on issues, traditionally, associated with the feminine – reproduction, maternity, and bodies that display female characteristics.

Much of the review and academic literature surrounding Piccinini's artwork is full of praise focusing on her maternal ethic of care and discourses of conventional maternity expressed in the work. Many articles mention Piccinini's affection for her creatures who have been described as "beguiling", "cute", "endearing" and "(tender) babies".[62] Piccinini speaks of some of her works as representing "a gesture of nurturing".[63] When reviewing Piccinini's installations critic Alison Barclay exclaims "One could call this an amazing zoo, but that might make Piccinini's sweet, dark-eyed face crumple and fall. She is very protective of her creatures."[64] Art critic Benjamin Genocchio states that "Piccinini is a good parent, even if she is caring for a pair of mutant lab rats" and her creatures are imbued with "an odd tenderness".[65] Genocchio sums up Piccinini's art with the claim that "the kind of work she is making could propel her to international stardom".[66]

---

[61] 'Big Mother', 2005, Elizabeth A. Sackler, Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum Web site, available at https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist_art_base/gallery/piccinini.php?i=1002, date accessed 3/5/08.

[62] Robert Nelson, 'Clever technology, serious questions', *The Age*, Saturday, January 4, 2003, Arts 17. Laura Fernandez Orgaz and Patricia Piccinini, The Naturally Artificial World, Reproduced on Patricia Piccinini's Website with permission from the catalogue for the exhibition "Tender Creatures" at Artium, Spain, available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/, date accessed 8/6/08. Katrina Strickland, 'Mother Love', *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, May 2-4, 2003, pp. 14-17., date accessed 7/6/08. See also Daniel Palmer, 'Interview with Patricia Piccinini and Peter Hennessey', *RealTime*, 2001, available on Patricia Piccinini's website at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/, date accessed 9/8/2002.

[63] Katrina Strickland, 'Mother Love', *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, May 2-4, 2003, pp. 14-17.

[64] Alison Barclay, 'Send in the clones', Arts and Entertainment, *Herald Sun*, Tuesday, December 17th 2002, p. 51.

[65] Benjamin Genocchio, 'Genetically Modified Sculpture', *Weekend Australian*, Jan 11-12, 2003, Arts, R21.

[66] Ibid.

Art critic Mark Pennings goes so far as to call Piccinini's work iconic and ironic – the latter claim both Piccinini and her husband refute.[67] Piccinini describes her artwork as "anti-ironic".[68] Peter Hennessy supports this claim as he writes "If there is one thing this work is not, it is ironic. This is warm, sincere work that more than opens itself up for charges of unfashionable sentimentality ... [Piccinini creates] a sort of lost dogs home for the stray and unwanted outcomes of contemporary ideas and technologies".[69] Piccinini states that "all of my work has that emotional dimension that shifts the apparent rational implications" and that "Empathy is at the heart of my practice'.[70] These comments, with an emphasis on emotion in opposition to critical engagement with issues, nurturing and the suggestion of self-sacrifice align Piccinini with a conventional maternity.

Expressions of traditional motherhood that inflect comments made by and about Piccinini and her work are one strand present in the academic and popular literature dealing with the artist and her ouvre. There is also a sense in the writings about Piccinini that she takes a middle path between the uncritical embracing of technophilic desires and feminist critiques of increasing surveillance and control of women's bodies assisted by innovative new technologies. Critic Robert Schubert's writings exemplify this kind of response to Piccinini's work. For instance, Schubert comments on one of Piccinini's earlier installations, LUMP, a monstrous representation of a genetically designed baby held by glamorous blonde celebrity Sohpie Lee stating that

> The intent was not to embrace the recombinant capacities of new media for their own experimental sake. Much less was it a critique of the disembodied maternity reflected, so feminism has argued, in the patriarchal abuses of VR technology. The point ... was to filter the representational

---

[67] Daniel Palmer, 'Interview with Patricia Piccinini and Peter Hennessey', *RealTime*, 2001, available on Patricia Piccinini's website at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/, date accessed 9/8/2002.

[68] Daniel Palmer, 'Interview with Patricia Piccinini and Peter Hennessey', *RealTime*, 2001, available on Patricia Piccinini's Web site at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/, date accessed 9/8/2002.

[69] Peter Hennessy, 'Patricia Piccinini's Offspring', *Call of the Wild* (Catalogue), MCA Sydney, 2002, available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/, date accessed 24/10/03.

[70] Laura Fernandez Orgaz and Patricia Piccinini, The Naturally Artificial World, Reproduced on Patricia Piccinini's Website with permission from the catalogue for the exhibition "Tender Creatures" at Artium, Spain, available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/, date accessed 8/6/08.

> sheen of 3-D-modeling through painterly precedents by cloning the corporatist Mother/LUMP from the classical pose of Madonna and Child.[71]

Schubert, however, does not comment further on the meanings and narratives that may attach to this technologization of the Madonna and Child configuration.

Academic discussions of Piccinini's artwork further reinforce her position as an innovative artist who skilfully combines elements of technology, nature and humanity in her work. Donna Haraway's essay on Piccinini's creatures, 'Speculative Fabulations for Technoculture's Generations', is an academic text that celebrates the artist's work in much the same way as the general reviewers in mainstream publications.[72] Donna Haraway whose cyborg still "runs amok" throughout a great deal of contemporary theory is undoubtedly one of the key academic feminist figures of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.[73] Haraway challenges notions of nature and culture as locked into binary oppositions and adopts a feminist definition of Western scientific knowledge as constructed and gender biased rather than objective or neutral.[74] Her work often focuses on the connections between scientific research and transnational capitalistic endeavours.[75] While she is highly critical of these interconnections of global commerce and science, Haraway offers nuanced responses to current debates concerning biotechnology. Haraway argues that biotechnological advances are neither intrinsically "bad" nor "good" for women. Instead she focuses on ethical considerations regarding the uses of biotechnology - Who gains from these

---

[71] Robert Schuber, 'Patricia Piccinini: Fetal Futures', *Art + Text*, 54, 1996, p. 34. (33-35). Images of *LUMP* and articles discussing the artwork are available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/, date accessed 27/3/08.

[72] Donna Haraway, 'Speculative Fabulations for Technoculture's Generations: Taking Care of Unexpected Country', 2007, available through Patricia Piccinini's website at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/, date accessed 7/7/08. Haraway's essay is also reproduced in pdf form by the Spanish Art Gallery-Museum *Artium* but the article is not linked to the gallery's website. Haraway's essay is available at http://www.artium.org/documentos/creaturesCatalogueHaraway.pdf, date accessed 14/11/08.

[73] *Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century' in* Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature, *(New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 149-181.*

[74] Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1991); Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986); and, Ruth Hubbard, *The Politics of Women's Biology*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press 1990).

innovations? Where does responsibility lie for the results of technoscientific experiments? Haraway's critical acceptance of the non-natural extends possibilities for thinking about transgressions of the body, gender and subject positions.

Haraway's writings are complex and sinuous engagements with "natureculture", representation and reality among many other topics.[76] Her article focusing on Piccinini is a mapping of anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose's research concerning Indigenous people living in New South Wales and the Northern Territory of Australia onto narratives of technoscience.[77] Drawing upon a range of scholarship from the fields of philosophy, anthropology, eco-feminism, and cultural studies, Rose develops an "ethics for decolonisation" based on forging connections rather than focusing on the deconstruction of colonial structures.[78] This ethics involves the articulation of the various responsibilities people have to each other, to stories of the past and to sacred sites. Rose's project is one of recuperation in which white Australians take ethical responsibility for the effects of colonialism by actively listening to and witnessing the stories of Indigenous people. From this process Rose argues that open dialogue and appropriate action are possible.[79]

Drawing on Rose's work, Haraway positions Piccinini as an artistically technoscientific version of the anthropologist. To establish this argument Haraway links herself to Piccinini stating that they are both "offspring of white settler colonies, their frontier practices ... their bad memories and troubled discourses of indigeneity ... progress and exclusion".[80] Then Haraway defines contemporary technoscience and technoculture as "frontier practices .. always announcing new worlds, proposing the novel as the solution to the old, figuring creation as radical invention and

---

[75] Donna, Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millenium.FemaleMan©_Meets_Oncomouse (TM): Feminism and Technoscience*, (New York and London: Routledge.1997).

[76] Haraway dissolves binaries of nature/culture preferring to use the term "natureculture". See Joseph Schneider, *Donna Haraway: Live Theory*, (New York: Continuum, 2005), p. 22.

[77] Deborah Bird Rose, *Reports from a Wild Country: Ethics for Decolonisation* (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2004).

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Donna Haraway, 'Speculative Fabulations for Technoculture's Generations: Taking Care of Unexpected Country', 2007, *Patricia Piccinini*, available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/, date accessed 7/7/08.

replacement".[81] Piccinini is, therefore, situated at the cutting edge of the "frontier practice" of technoculture by personal association with Haraway and by her artistic interventions in narratives of contemporary (bio)technologies. For Haraway, Piccinini's sympathetic renderings of monstrous technobodies embody a technological take on Rose's arguments concerning the embracing of an ethics of responsibility for all. The crux of Haraway's article is the bold claim that Piccinini's "art is always tuned to reconciliation".[82] The word "reconciliation" is heavily weighted in contemporary Australian culture as it has come to mean a hoped for yet seemingly unattainable resolution to historical and ongoing conflict between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Haraway's use of the word seems to say too much in the current context.

Haraway focuses on Piccinini's often expressed "love" for her creatures and the artist's assertions that responsibility must be taken for these imagined products of biotechnology which results in their inclusion in family structures. Quoting art critic Jacqulyn Millner, Haraway contends that "The love she (Piccinini) appears to propose is not of the romantic, infatuated ilk - classic technophilia – but of the familial variety, with its overtones of responsibility, ethical guidance and life-long commitment".[83] This comment suggests a traditional notion of family which, in its conventionality, cannot help but recall dominant notions of the heterosexual, white, nuclear family. It is extremely problematic to set up conventional narratives of family within the realm of technoscience as a metaphor for Australia's responsibility to seek resolutions to the many conflicts and injustices that historically mark interactions between indigenous and non-indigenous people. In her essay, Haraway argues against a traditional definition of the familial in Piccinini's work claiming that "Happily this is not the world famous heterosexual family of Christian settler imaginations and of all too current national policy".[84] Although this is ostensibly the case, there are also numerous suggestions of conventional discourses of family in Piccinini's artwork as I discuss throughout this chapter. Haraway's reliance upon a somewhat cosy "parental approach" of "unconditional love" to resolve complex contemporary issues of technoscience stands in direct contrast to her earlier figure of the cyborg – the "non-

---

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Jacquelyn Millner quoted by Haraway in 'Speculative Fabulations'.

innocent" melding of meat and machine – that laughingly challenges traditional presuppositions of nature and culture.[85]

With the emphasis placed by Haraway, in this essay, and Piccinini, in her art and press, on the familial as well as family obligation and responsibility for the products of technoscience where is the investigation of the maternal? Haraway writes of Piccinini's love and care of her monstrous creations but does not mention any aspect of maternity or maternal bodies. Instead Haraway focuses on the playfulness exhibited by the figures and their implications in narratives of biotechnology, culture and nature. These are vitally important aspects of the creatures that Haraway identifies but they are grounded in and animated by a monstrous maternity that, I argue, carries both threads of questioning and reinforcing conventional discourses of technoscience, bodies and motherhood.

Although Haraway's essay carries all the markings of her erudite and playful writings it also reads in parts like hagiography. For instance, she describes the artist as "a sister in technoculture, a co-worker committed to taking "naturecultures" seriously".[86]. As well as positioning Piccinini as a "kindred spirit", Haraway, also describes the artist as a "compelling storyteller". Haraway even begins to write with the sometimes intemperate passion of the fan as she enthuses about "my favourite Piccinini critters: *Nature's Little Helpers* ... these drawings, installations, and sculptures palpably argue that the artist has fallen in love with her speculatively fabulated progeny; she has certainly made me do so." While this sharing of the ways in which a viewer has been/is affected by art is an important part of the discussion of artworks, it also needs to be balanced by critical analysis which in Haraway's essay is partial. The article is also founded on huge claims in which Haraway attempts the construction of technoscience as a frontier practice over which she maps reconciliation processes for Indigenous people. These two issues are too divergent for the comparison to be meaningful.

---

[84] Haraway in 'Speculative Fabulations'.

[85] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women.*

[86] Donna Haraway, 'Speculative Fabulations for Technoculture's Generations: Taking Care of Unexpected Country', 2007, *Patricia Piccinini* available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/, date accessed 7/7/08.

In a similar vein to Haraway, academic Kim Toffoletti foregoes critical engagement with the narratives of maternity that are central to Piccinini's art. Toffoletti focuses on Piccinini's attempts to corporealize an acceptance of the potential products of technoscience.[87] It is in this focus on the acknowledgement of the possible results of technoscientific experiementation that the projects of Haraway, Toffoletti and Piccinini connect. Piccinini's art is read by Toffoletti through the work of Jean Baudrillard as well as Donna Haraway's feminist investigation of technoscience.[88] Toffoletti writes that "Piccinini's work finds a theoretical equivalent in the writings of Donna Haraway ... Like Haraway, Piccinini avoids a technological determinism that decrees the non-natural a threat to human existence".[89]

Toffoletti argues that Piccinini's artwork like Baudrillard's concepts of simulation and simulacra challenges entrenched notions of direct correlations between representation and the real that haunt interrogations of technoscientific research and its results.[90] For Toffoletti, both Piccinini and Baudrillard subvert the conventional conceptualization of representations of technoscience as reflecting and building reality. As Toffoletti writes

> By tapping into the confused cultural space of simulation, Piccinini offers us a site of ambiguity, a transitional place where established dichotomies are no longer sustainable. The potency of her posthuman figurations for feminist thinking lies in an engagement with contemporary simulation culture, which functions to create new possibilities for what a subject might be in technoculture.[91]

Toffoletti convincingly frames her reading of Piccinini's oeuvre through Baudrillard and Haraway's evocation of simulation and questioning of binarized thinking regarding the products of technoscience. Toffoletti does not, however,

---

[87] Kim Toffoletti, *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls: Feminism, Popular Culture and the Posthuman Body*, (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007) and Kim Toffoletti, 'Imagining the Posthuman: Patricia Piccinini and the Art of Simulation' *Outskirts: Feminisms Along the Edge*, 11 (2003) available at http://www.chloe.uwa.edu.au/outskirts/archive/volume11/toffoletti, date accessed 4/7/08.

[88] Donna Haraway, 'Speculative Fabulations for Technoculture's Generations: Taking Care of Unexpected Country', 2007, *Patricia Piccinini*, available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/, date accessed 7/7/08.

[89] Toffoletti, 'Imagining the Posthuman'.

[90] Toffoletti, *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls*, p. 158.

[91] Ibid, p. 159.

examine the binaries and conventions that persistently emerge in Piccinini's work alongside the subversions of dichotomies and dominant discourse. Despite the strong presence of maternally oriented themes that mingle with the tropes of technology in many of Piccinini's installations, Toffoletti maintains her focus on simulation and subversion rather than the reinstatement of the conventional and maternal bodies. As Piccinini's creatures, by her own admission, are inspired by and steeped in narratives of maternity and technology, Toffoletti's silence on this issue leaves a tempting gap.

The fulsome praise of Haraway and Toffoletti's writings is typical of academic and mainstream media responses to Piccinini's creatures. Australian art critic, Linda Williams states that "The critical reception Piccinini's work in Australia has thus far been a fairly undiluted flow of praise".[92] Williams continues on in her article to offer one of the few critical examinations of Piccinini's artwork. Writing in 2004, Williams challenges the popular conception of the artist's work as offering strong critiques of technoscience. Williams argues that while Piccinini's work is informed by narratives of technoscience, the appeal of her oeuvre is due to a number of factors that lie outside the artworks themselves. Piccinini's popularity, according to Williams, is grounded in the ubiquitous fascination that new technologies hold for many as well as her construction as a celebrity artist. Williams adds that the hyper-realism of Piccinini's creatures also contribute to the glossy attraction of the objects.

Amongst all the praise for Piccinini it is hard to find a comment, apart from Williams' assessment, that goes beyond the seduction of the moment. Mark Pennings admits that Piccinini's work "must seduce, if only for that glorious 'moment' ... It is difficult to find a definitive explanation for the phenomena".[93] Critic Robert Nelson of *The Age* also offers a mildly dissenting voice concerning Piccinini's artwork. Nelson foregoes discussions concerning the corporealization of techno-scientific issues and debates in order to focus on Piccinini's broad appeal: the seduction of high gloss surfaces that reflect the viewer as well as the gee-wizardry of current tehcnology. He writes that the viewer of Piccinini's artwork will

---

[92] Linda Williams, 'Spectacle or Critique: Reconsidering the Meaning of Reproduction in the Work of Patricia Piccinini', *Southern Review: Communication, Politics and Culture*, Vol 37, Iss. 1, 2004, pp. 76-94.

[93] Mark Pennings, 'Enchantment, Technoscience and Desire', *Art and Australia*, Vol 37, no. 4, 2000, p. 564.

> wonder who is responsible for these new lives, for working out their freedoms, their education or destiny. But do not agonise over the ethics too much. The theme is make-believe. It is art that is primarily about what the artist can come up with. The work is slick and any moral dilemma is only a condiment to the gag ... it is flashy tricky fun. [94]

My discussions of Piccinini's background, art and writings centred on the artist demonstrate her positioning at the intersection of flows of academic interrogation, multimedia art, technology, culture and biology. Throughout these strands, threads of maternity surface and mutate. Now it is time for these central threads concerning the seductive and monstrous maternal bodies to take centre stage in this chapter. But before I investigate Piccinini's appealingly grotesque mother-figures (some are just appealing) I return briefly to a consideration of the figure of the monster. Then, I interrogate Piccinini's creatures, noting their enmeshment in narratives of mothering, the monstrous, race and class. Finally, I discuss the notion of monstrous cute that I argue informs Piccinini's work.

Monstrous Bodies

In this section I return to the idea of the monstrous that I raised in the *Patchwork Girl* chapter as it is also a central frame for Piccinini's creatures. I continue to utilize notions of the monster as the other of the hegemonic subject and as a transgression of subjectivity conceived in rigidly ordered and binarized dualisms.[95] According to Rosi Braidotti, the monster is not solely a body or a concept but a plane of meshings of gender, race, flesh and paradox. This dynamic construction of the monster is appropriate for my investigations as the artworks I am examining are both the results and the producers of interactive flows of intersecting narratives of technologies, bio-science, culture, and nature. Like the monstrous bodies of *Patchwork Girl*, Piccinini's monsters are also hybrid creatures which challenge boundaries of human/animal/machine/technology/nature.

---

[94] Robert Nelson, 'Clever technology, serious questions', *The Age*, Saturday, January 4, 2003, Arts 17.

[95] Rosi Braidotti, 'Signs of Wonder and Traces of Doubt: on Teratology and Embodied Difference', in *Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs: Feminist Confrontations with Science*, Medicine and Cyberspace, edited by Nina Lykke and Rosi Braidotti, (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1996), pp. 135-152. Margrit Shildrick, 'This Body which is not One: Dealing with Differences', *Body and Society*, 5, no. 2-3, 1999, pp. 77-92. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Monster Culture (Seven Theses) in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*,

Rosi Braidotti's investigation of the monster is closely linked with notions of teratology.[96] One of the key narratives of teratology, according to Braidotti, is the construction of those who live the furthest away from western civilization as members of monstrous "races" – being less civilized and/or having less ability to structure a society based on law. Braidott cites three examples of this racialized monstrosity. First she includes stories about the abominable snowman who lives in areas geographically distant from centres of western civilization.[97] In the second instance Braidotti refers to science fiction texts that reproduce the dominant teratological tradition of fabricating foreign places – in this case, outer space - as potentially areas of monstrous difference to civilizations on earth.[98] The third example of geographically determined monstrosity details an incident of racial violence when an Austrian Neo-Nazi group attacked and commanded an encampment of gypsies to "go back to India".[99]

As well as connections between teratology and embodied differences, the monstrous is also historically linked to the female body's capacity for biological reproduction.[100] Margrit Shildrick argues that "whatever the specifically ascribed meaning, transhistorical horror and fascination with the monstrous seems to centre both on the disruption of the corporeal limits that supposedly mark out the human, and on the uncertain aetiology of monsters – a response that speaks to a more general anxiety about origins, and the relationship between maternal and foetal bodies."[101] These responses to monstrosity are evidenced in the deep-seated cultural anxieties which continue to circulate around female mother bodies. There are numerous contemporary debates about maternal bodies that seek to contain these corporealities and their behaviours within strict limits and boundaries. Shildrick writes of "the inherent monstrosity of the maternal body ... It is not just that the mother is always

---

Edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 1996), pp. 3-25.

96 Rosi Braidotti, 'Cyberteratologies: Female Monsters Negotiate the Other's Participation in Humanity's Far Future', in *Envisioning the Future: Science Fiction and the Next Millenium*, Marleen S. Barr, pp. 146-172, (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), p. 146.

97 Braidotti, 'Signs of Wonder',, pp. 142-143.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid, p. 142.

100 Ibid, pp. 290-301.

101 Margrit Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self*, (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002), p. 29.

capable of producing monstrosity, but that she is monstrous in herself. It is above all the very fecundity of the female, the capacity to confound definition *all on their own* that elicits normative anxiety" (emphasis in original).[102]

New reproductive technologies enable the close examination of pregnant and/or maternal bodies yet they also reinstate the notion of the monstrosity of maternity. They are used within dominant discourses of technoscience, to elevate fetal life above mother bodies and render the maternal reproducing body as potentially threatening to the foetus, needing continual techno-medical surveillance and control.[103] The intense level of scrutiny of maternal bodies made available to current medical science by contemporary reproductive technologies alleviates normative and historical concerns about maternal imagination unduly influencing birth outcome. Anxieties concerning maternal imagination have now shifted to concerns about maternal behaviours and narratives of self-regulation.

Connections between monstrosity and the female reproductive body are also the focus of Barbara Creed's analysis of representations of women in horror films. Instead of simply changing the phrase "male monster" to "female monster" Creed uses the term "monstrous-feminine" in order to underline the gendered differences between the two representations of monstrosity. Creed writes that "The reasons why the monstrous-feminine horrifies her audience are quite different from the reasons why the male monster horrifies his audience."[104] The author posits that the monstrosity of females depicted as monsters in horror films is usually dependent upon their maternity and/or reproductive capabilities. Among a number of representations of monstrous female bodies Creed identifies several explicitly. She observes the monstrous-feminine of the archaic mother, linked with boundary-breaching death and the demonic in the film *Alien*. Other examples of feminine monstrosity closely linked to women's generative powers that Creed describes are the monstrous womb in the film *The Brood* and the castrating mother in *Psycho*. Creed argues that these instances of

---

[102] Ibid, p. 44.

[103] See Carol Stabile, *Feminism and the Technological Fix*, (Manchester, England, New York: Manchester University Press, 1994). See also Barbara Duden, *Disembodying Women: Perspectives on Pregnancy and the Unborn*, (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 19930.

[104] Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 3.

monstrosity are dependent upon the transgression of boundaries of human/inhuman as well as the reliance on the notion of women's reproductive processes and capacities as inherently grotesque and abject.

In her exploration of the monstrous-feminine Creed utilizes Julia Kristeva's potent concept of the abject. The abject is that which is "improper", "unclean" and removed from the centre of culture - displaced and marginal. [105] Although the abject is repulsion and horror it is also paradoxically linked with attraction and fascination. According to Kristeva, the abject not only produces sensations of horror it also engenders feelings of jouissance (something like joyousness). Kristeva argues that the infant's attempts to separate from the mother are his/her first experience of the abject. The child's movement into the realm of language and the recognition of defined boundaries renders the maternal body abject. Kristeva writes about this process of separation: "It is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling."[106] While Kristeva does not offer a gendered account of abjection resulting from the infant's separation from the mother, other psychoanalytical theory suggests that it is the male child who finds this process especially difficult and who, even as an adult, greatly fears reincorporation into the maternal and the resultant loss of masculine identity.[107] For the female child, however, the horror of coming and separating from the mother's body is reflected in the abject state of their own female body which also potentially possesses the same powers of reproduction and authority.

Alongside fear and horror, the abject is also transgression, ambiguity and threat. It "disturbs identity, system, order ... does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite".[108] As Creed, drawing on the work of Kristeva, writes

---

[105] Julia Kristeva, *Powers Of Horror: An Essay On Abjection*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 2.

[106] Julia Kristeva, *Powers Of Horror: An Essay On Abjection*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). P, 13.

[107] For example, see Janet Wolff, 'Reinstating Corporeality: Feminism and Body Politics', in *Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, edited by Amelia Jones, (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 414-426.

[108] Julia Kristeva, *Powers Of Horror: An Essay On Abjection*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 4.

> The place of the abject is 'where meaning collapses', the place where 'I' am not. The abject threatens life, it must be 'radically excluded' from the place of the living subject, propelled away from the body and deposited on the other side of the imaginary border which separates the self from that which threatens the self.[109]

The abject subverts rules, laws, conventions and binaries. Bodies that are monstrous and maternal are, therefore, liminal figures riddled with traces of abjection - fleshy escapings from cultural discourses of feminine corporeal restraint and the expulsion of body fluids.

Slippery Mutants

The monstrous bodies of the creatures in Piccinini's artwork such as *The Young Family, Truck Babies*, and *Still Life With Stem Cells* function as images of cyborgean and posthuman conditions. Like the monster and the cyborg, that hybrid combination of flesh and machine, the posthuman body is a boundary figure that exists in a hypertextual moment in sometimes contradictory discourses.[110] Theorists Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston flesh out the notion of the "non-species" posthuman bodies by writing that

> Posthuman bodies are the causes and effects of postmodern relations of power and pleasure, virtuality and reality, sex and its consequences. The posthuman body is a technology, a screen, a projected image ... a techno-body ... The human body itself is no longer part of "the family of man" but of a zoo of posthumanities .. They [posthuman bodies] are of the past and future lived as present crisis."[111]

N. Katherine Hayles posits that the posthuman body occupies a multiplicity of positions situated at various intersections of sites that range from the techno-scientific discourses of virtual reality, artificial intelligence and biotechnology to the popular culture texts of science fiction film and literature.[112] Posthuman bodies, thus, inhabit a diversity of classificatory divisions that break down traditional boundaries between

---

[109] Creed, *Horror And The Monstrous Feminine: Film Feminism, Psychoanlaysis*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 65. Words in quotation marks are from Julia Kristeva, *Powers Of Horror: An Essay On Abjection.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 2.

[110] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[111] Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, *Posthuman Bodies*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 3-4.

high and low culture. The melding and confusion of fact and fantasy entailed in the posthuman condition suggests Baudrillard's realm of the hyperreal where these two spheres are indistinguishable. As a result of this collapse of distinct categories, meaning is unable to be generated solely in one classificatory division existing instead in a number of locations. I argue that Piccinini's creatures are monstrous in their abjection and posthuman in their intermeshings of narratives of biotechnology and hybrid media technologies that traverse the tired old boundaries between "high" and "low" culture.

Piccinini's mixed monsters also work as flickering signifiers of mutation.[113] The flickering signifiers incorporate mutation and monstrosity as well as tropes of the cyborg and the posthuman. Hayles describes mutation as "the catastrophe in the pattern/randomness dialectic analogous to castration in the presence/absence dialectic. It marks a rupture of pattern so extreme that the expectation of continuous replication can no longer be sustained. But as with castration, this only appears to be a disruption located at a specific moment". [114] The mutant bodies of Piccinini's artwork rupture traditional notions of how maternity and technology are to be thought of and represented. Their melding of flesh and flows of technology makes material contemporary debates concerning the effects of new technologies and gestures towards the possibilities of posthuman embodiment.

Piccinini's creations are abject monstrous in their not-quite human forms that also exceed the boundaries of other species. While the stem cell lumps transgress the borders of the "naturally occurring" human body, other creatures like the mother from *The Young Family* are supposedly scientifically engineered so that they slide over physical delineations of humanity and animality. The conglomerate bodies are also slippery mutants, occupying spaces that both inhabit and go beyond the categories of human and animal. Piccinini's mother monsters, grounded in the abject and appeal, play with boundaries that attempt to contain conventional maternity.

---

[112] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[113] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 26-40.

[114] Hayles, *Posthuman*, p. 33.

Becomings

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's ideas of "becoming" are useful in the examination of currents of maternity, monstrosity and technology that circulate through Piccinini's artwork.[115] In Piccinini's artwork becomings of monstrosity challenge our ideas of what it is to be human, how we think of motherhood, and what constitutes a family in the twenty-first century. Two major becomings that echo throughout Piccinini's work are located in the maternal and the monstrous. Becoming maternal in Piccinini's work involves movement from the monstrous other to the kindly nurturing mother. Alterity produced from techno-science made flesh gives way in this directional flow to recognition of the familial and the familiar. The pig-mother of *The Young Family* is the product of trans-species and genetic interventions yet her kindly "motherly" eyes, weary demeanour and suckling of her young shifts the monstrous body of genetic patchwork back to an earth mother sensibility of the maternal as nurturing, sustenance and plenty. Piccinini's works enact a number of other maternal becomings as they are visual materializations of the many ways that the role of "mother" is performed. From the maternal gaze of the little girl in *Still Life with Stem Cells* to the sow-like creature of *The Young Family*, and the motherly positioning of the Japanese street girls in *Truck Babies*, the position of "mother' is rhizomatically becoming fractured maternity.

A number of other becomings inflect Piccinini's art. One of these becomings describes movements from "natural" bodies to technologically charged corporealities. Another expresses the becomings of techno-maternity. Within Piccinini's work there are also becomings of cute. These becomings mesh and separate, spawning their own hybrid movements and creatures.

All of these narratives of the monster, mutant, becomings and maternity influence and charge the artwork of Patricia Piccinini. Discourses of the abject, the monster, the posthuman and the mutant usually work to destablize traditional notions of identity and species. But how do these disparate elements operate in Piccinini's artwork? Is the subversion of the margin re-routed and reinvested with the conventional? In the following sections I examine the ways in which Piccinini constructs a contemporary take on maternity inflected with the monstrous. I interrogate the sites in Piccinini's

---

[115] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Translated by Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

work where narratives of maternity intersect with discourses of biotechnologies, race and class. So, now let us turn to the slippery mutants themselves.

Piccinini's Babies – The Artworks Themselves

Patricia Piccinini's creatures are not only the imagined products of stem cell research, cloning and genetic engineering. They are monstrous maternal blendings of science, technology, culture, race and class. In order to further unpack the meanings that cohere around the hybrid creatures I now turn to a more indepth investigation of the artworks that Piccinini likes to think of as her babies.

Still Life With Stem Cells

First exhibited at the Sydney Biennale 2002, *Still Life With Stem Cells* (Figures 18 and 19, p 260)[116] is a solidified snapshot of "average" Australian suburban life. This installation focuses on the sculpture of a little girl who is physically in the middle of the piece. She is surrounded by pink blobs of flesh which are the results of stem cell experimentation. These creatures assume a variety of shapes and are, perhaps, her siblings – or her own (doll) children. The girl sits cross-legged on the carpeted floor as though she was "sitting on the mat" at school ready to listen to a story or take part in a lesson. Some of her sandy hair spills from its tie while other strands are firmly lodged behind her left ear. A few freckles dot her face. The girl is obviously content to look after the little stem cell products. She is dressed in a practical fashion – although there is a vague sense in the freshness of the outfit that these may be her "good" clothes that have just been put on for company. Her skivvy is a cheerfully bright pinkish red to match the flower buds on her patterned pinafore.

This frozen polariod of typical suburban life could be a captured moment from many an Australian home except the still life referred to is not immediately recognizable as human. The fleshy forms that seem to gambol on the carpet around the figure of the young girl as well as being held by her suggest parts but not the whole of human bodies. On one of the forms a mouth-like protuberance erupts from the pinky flesh. Another sports what could be the knobbled end of an elbow or part of a knee.

---

[116] Figure 18: Still Life With Stem Cells 1and Figure 19: Still Life With Stem Cells 2, sourced from Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, available at http://www.roslynoxley9.com.au/artists/31/Patricia_Piccinini/249/, date accessed 21/10/09.

Page 260 has been removed for copyright or proprietary reasons.

Figure 18: Still Life With Stem Cells and Figure 19: Still Life With Stem Cells 2, sourced from Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, available at http://www.roslynoxley9.com.au/artists/31/Patricia Piccinini/249/ , date accessed 21/10/09.

On yet another object, holes that could be nostrils mark the flesh. Some of the objects look bent over or folded upon themselves. Others are marked by what appear to be pores as well as forming creases and folds that give the impression of movement, perhaps escape. One is kidney shaped. Its neighbour loosely resembles a reclining cave drawing of an earth mother goddess made flesh. The creature that the girl holds and hugs to her own body is reminiscent of a huge fetus that, in the artwork, is snoozing near the heartbeat of the human child.

The title of the installation, *Still Life With Stem Cells* draws directly on current debates that continue to circulate around the topic of stem cell research. From the perspective of various feminisms, questions of social justice as well as cultural change resonate throughout stem cell research debates.[117] Will stem cell therapy, in whatever aspect is relevant to the particular situation, be available to the poor or disadvantaged? Will women using fertility clinics be pressured to donate unused embryos to laboratories? How will extensive use of stem cell technologies assist in the shaping of western ideas about maternity and family?

In this installation Piccinini inserts the imagined results of stem cell research into a white middle class environment that appears to stand for the average Australian home. As a discursive construction, middle-classness is evoked in the artwork by the emphasis on the cleanliness of the surroundings and the central human figure as well as the "tastefully" muted shade of carpet.[118] The lone human in this installation also supports general theorisations of the middle class as individuals in contrast to notions of the working class as "massified" unthinkingly producing large families of grubby noisy children.[119] Suggestions of economic-based middle-class privilege in this artwork are also hinted at by the fashionable new clothes the girl is wearing.

---

[117] For an overview of this area see, for example, Nancy Lublin, *Pandora's Box: Feminism Confronts Reproductive Technology*, (Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997); Sarah Franklin and Robbie Davis Floyd, 'Reproductive Technologies', *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), available at http://www.davis-floyd.com/USERIMAGES/File/Reproductive%20Technologies.pdf, date accessed 2/3/08; and, Judy Wajcman, Feminism Confronts Technology, (North Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1991).

[118] For discussions of notions of class please see Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*, (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997).

[119] Ibid.

The gaze of the girl is maternal, her smile is enigmatic in the style of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and her posture is one of leaning towards the products of stem cell research. Her right hand firmly clasps one of the creatures to her in a protective gesture as though she was holding a favourite doll or a kitten and her left hand is placed in a solidly proprietorial move on to the top of another monstrous lump. With obvious affection the little girl gazes at the fleshy creatures. The little girl's posture and placement in the scene evokes the spectre of a loving maternal body. Her tender gaze and the gentle tactile connection between child and lump resonates with flows of a nurturing, caring, physical maternity. A cute white little-girl maternity is suggested in this scene as the child and the stem cell lumps are positioned and fashioned as though the girl was happily playing with her dolls and pretending to be a mother.

Resonances of the embryonic play across the stem cell forms making rhizomatic connections between species, bodies and biological processes. Juliana Engberg describes the stem cell lumps as

> Lightly furry, flesh coloured, textured like skin: some with moles and other skin markings: meaty. They have the faint hint of the kind of veins we sometimes observe in heads of newly born babies, which make these like-life forms seem utterly vulnerable and fragile ... The are like small fetal animals, as yet not quite formed ...And while its true they share qualities and attributes with hairless rats, cats, dogs, baby mice and piglets they appear to have a closer affinity to humans than any other kind of animal one can think of. They seem both cursed and potential.[120]

Indeed, the fleshy creatures are reminiscent of Piccinini's earlier work, *LUMP*: the genetically engineered designer baby. The forms are monstrous and obviously not fully developed human beings. However, it is possible to identify human-like anatomical structures in the work such as skin tone - which also indicates whiteness - spinal cord, nose, and mouth. It is the connections between hybrid and monstrous physical forms that simultaneously disturbs and appeals. The stem cell creatures are alien but familiar. They are not immediately recognizable as human but possessing enough human-like characteristics to render them as potential human subjects.

While the positioning of the stem cell creatures in an ordinary familial setting challenges notions of human subjectivity and family there are elements of the piece

---

[120] Juliana Engberg, *retrospectology: the world according to patricia piccinini*, Australian Centre For Contemporary Art, 2002, p. 40

that reinstate the conventional. The title of the piece, *Still Life With Stem Cells*, alludes to tradition, harmony and stillness in the reference to the convention whereby art students are required at some stage in their studies to complete a "still life" composition, usually of fruit or flowers. Engberg describes Piccinini's use, in this piece, of the genre of paintings detailing children's play that was prevalent in the eighteenth century.[121] She writes that

> Pursuing their simple games of blowing bubbles, building houses of cards, reading and writing, these children not only illustrated innocent childhood in gentle occupation, but alluded to the ways in which science and its principles were being absorbed by the adults of the future. Bubbles and houses of cards become demonstrations of the laws of physics. Piccinini re-engages this genre with her stunning three-dimensional work Still Life With Stem Cells in which child's play once again demonstrates the new and often confronting ideas of science.[122]

These comments are, perhaps, oblique references to Piccinini's much reported beginnings as an artist when she studied painting. Although detailed in the *Retrospectology* exhibition catalogue, the painterly inspiration for *Still Life* is not immediately apparent to the observer. Apart from the title, obvious clues and links to the eighteenth-century tradition of painting childhood scenes are absent from the work. We, the viewers, depend upon the catalogue entry written by the curator of the exhibition to record these kind of insights.

Upon reading about this painterly connection with representations of utopian moments of childhood and science, I wondered whether *Still Life* would be a work of irony, a critical take on stem cell research and imagined notions of perfected childhood. However, this interpretation is challenged by several aspects of the work and the artist's conception of her work. In an interview with her husband and chief collaborator, Peter Hennessey, Piccinini claims that "I feel that there's hardly any irony in my work; if there's anything, there'll be sincerity, which people sometimes find hard to deal with. I would say my work is anti-ironic" [123] Hennessey continues to criticise the use of irony as a standpoint and to underline the anti-irony positions of

---

[121] Juliana Engberg, *retrospectology: the world according to patricia piccinini*, Australian Centre For Contemporary Art, 2002, p. 40.

[122] Juliana Engberg, *retrospectology: the world according to patricia piccinini*, Australian Centre For Contemporary Art, 2002, p. 40

[123] Daniel Palmer, 'Interview with Patricia Piccinini and Peter Hennessey', *RealTime*, 2001, available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/essay.php?id=6, p. 1.

himself and Piccinini. He states that "The thing about irony is that it's a very safe and acceptable way to avoid having an opinion. An ironic position is not really a position – it is not open to criticism because you don't really believe it or espouse it. This happens as much in popular as 'high' culture: where it becomes difficult to distinguish from cynicism."[124] Piccinini adds that "its also interesting to work with what's important today, which is meaningful for our everyday lives" while Hennessy continues "It's social realism if its anything ... the current political condition of people living in the world today, in our world anyway".[125] It is unclear what exactly constitutes "our world" for Piccinini and Hennessey and how "social realism" and an anti-irony stance work in art that relies heavily upon humour, cute appeal, and "sincerity". Yet another reading of *Still Life* however, that focuses on Piccinini and Hennessey's claims that sincerity rather than irony is the cornerstone of the artist's work enables the interpretation that childhood is a location for perfect innocence and science is a force of wonder and revelation. This interpretation of the artwork leads the viewer back to a reinstatement of traditional discourses of art and human interactions with technoscience. The movement back to the conventional also sets the scene for the promotion of threads of traditional maternity.

Notions of childhood innocence and the magical power of science are then mediated through the maternal gaze of the little girl. The installation celebrates a white little-girl maternity that evokes images of a girl assuming the role of mother in her play with some dolls. Indeed, the motherly look is the pivotal aspect of *Still Life* that acts as transformative medium, magically and maternally turning nostalgic eighteenth-century constructions of childhood and science into a utopian twenty-first century tableau of conventional liberal values. This liberal message assures the viewer that all life, even if it appears monstrous or troubling is loved by the sacrificing, acquiescent and nurturing mother.

Maternity, in a hypertextual moment, is represented in *Still Life* as becoming child-like wonder, nurturance, and, obvious affection for the monstrous and grotesque. Insurrection of conventional maternity occurs in the representation of monstrosity as the object of the loving maternal gaze rather than just the abject in this piece. Therefore, the becoming enacted by the maternal figure in this artwork is a becoming

---

[124] Palmer, Interview with Patricia Piccinini and Peter Hennessey, *RealTime*, p. 1.

mother of the monstrous-within-the-ordinary in a tactile embracing of suburban averageness and scientific construction. Both fabrications - suburbia and the technology of stem cell research - rest affectionately upon the other in this piece. Their close imbrication reveals and underscores the constructededness of each element - the ideal of the great Australian dream of life in the suburbs is just as much a construction as the scientifically engineered products of stem cell research.

Meldings of the monstrous and the maternal in *Stem Cells* challenge and reinstate tropes of traditional motherhood. The little-girl maternity of this installation shifts beyond traditional tropes of maternity and monstrosity. It is the object of the maternal gaze that is monstrous not the mother figure who represents average white middle-class motherhood. The disruptive power of Braidotti's dynamic monster, however, is denied in the representation of "ordinary" motherhood that draws upon dominant discourses. In one reading of the installation, internal monstrosity is implied as the little girl's emotional and physical closeness to the stem cell products suggests that they are siblings. Yet, in another reading, the invisible monstrosity that refuses conventional borders of bodies, biotechnology, and family is rendered subservient to depictions of nurturing and sacrificial motherhood. This flow to the traditional is evident in the positionings of the stem cell lumps and the lovingly attentive little girl. All the threads of the conventional in this installation, therefore, contain and silence the monstrous maternity of paradox and challenge.

Truck Babies

Truck Babies (Figures 20 and 21, p 266)[126] is one of Piccinini's earlier installations. The Truck Babies are two objects resembling small trucks and they are accompanied by teenage mentor/maternal figures. These infant trucks and mentor figures were first exhibited in 1999 at the Tolarno Gallery in Melbourne. Inspired by Piccinini's travels on American highways (interstates), the Truck Babies are the imagined infant progeny of enormous real-life trucks. One pink, one blue, both pastel shades, the Truck Babies stand in the installation appearing to look intently at a bank of monitors on the wall in

---

[125] Palmer, Interview with Patricia Piccinini and Peter Hennessey, *RealTime*, p. 1.

[126] Figure 20: Truck Babies sourced from Patricia Piccinini's website available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/pp2/tb2/tb2.htm#, date accessed 21/10/09.

Figure 21: Truck Babies and Big Sisters sourced from *Artium* website available at http://www.artium.org/ingles/expo_picinini.html, date accessed 21/10/09

Page 266 has been removed for copyright or proprietary reasons.

Figure 20: Truck Babies, sourced from Patricia Piccinini's website available at
http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/pp2/tb2/tb2.htm#
date accessed 21/10/09.

Figure 21: Truck Babies and Big Sisters sourced from Artium website available at
http://www.artium.org/ingles/expo_picinini.html
date accessed 21/10/09

front of them. Their squarish headlights sit on either side of a shiny vertical grill with an emblem, pink and blue respectively, stationed in the middle like a seal on a letter. The glossy bonnets slope gently upwards to the darkened windscreens. The blackened surface of the trucks' windscreens evoke a sense of mystery tinged with a feeling of something slightly sinister looking out from the panel that the viewer's gaze is unable to penetrate. Lights, horn and antenna sit atop the cabin all shiny, new, gleaming straight off the assembly line and ready for action. The trucks' bodies flow from the top of the cabin into a triple hump of glistening fibreglass curves. Undulations then fall away from the swell of the buttocks to neat little tail lights situated like dimples at the back of the trucks. Wheels at the side are small, shiny and orderly like marching techno-caterpillers. Juliana Engberg describes them as "plump ...infantile versions of their parental gene pool. They have fresh skins, clean chrome bits, belly button badges, expressive big eyes and cute bums!"[127] The overall impression of the Truck Babies is one of polished shine, newness, and lustrous curves that swell and ebb over and around the object. Truck Babies appear newly minted, fresh off the assembly line and eager for action in the world that will eventually wear the gloss and sheen from the perfect pastel finish.

Five monitors are lined up in a straight row on a pale wall directly facing the Truck Babies. The images on these screens are clearly reflected in the windscreens of the Truck Babies. These monitors display the images of teenage Japanese girls - the Truck Babies' family. The girls are presented in medium shot. They project a contemporary trend conscious image, all of them wearing funky T-shirts, while some display shell necklaces and/or bracelets, and others wear many chains around their necks. Piccinini describes the girls as "young techno street-wise and fashion-conscious teenage girls of the city (Tokyo)."[128] The teenagers speak directly to the camera and their spoken words appear in print at the bottom of the screen. Their comments are strange and humorous mixtures of traffic rules, proverbs and mystical pronouncements:

> Give way to the right unless turning left.
> See with your heart, drive with your mind.

---

[127] Juliana Engberg, 'Truck Babies", *Retrospectology: the World According to Patricia Piccinini Exhibition Catalogue,* p.24.

[128] Patricia Piccinini, *Truck Babies Artist Statement,* available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/essay.php?id=11

Be the truck that you admire.
Do not overtake turning vehicle.
Sometimes the highway is not the fastest route.

Footage is replayed in continual loops. At times the girls lapse from their measured verbal delivery directed towards the camera and temporarily sink into giggles while their hands cover their mouths. This laughing collapse that regularly punctuates the flow of advice given is reminiscent of outtakes or "bloopers" segments of television shows such as Funniest Home Videos *Liar*.[129]

In *Truck Babies* notions of the conventional and the subversive are hypertextually upheld and ruptured. Borders and boundaries of machine, animal, human, technology and maternity are troubled. Traditional tropes of motherbodies are overturned and upheld. Piccinini calls the teenage girls that the Truck Babies look towards the Big Sisters of the infant machines but I argue that these girls can also be read as assuming a maternal role as a result of their positioning and their advice-giving. The screens on which the images of the girls are displayed are positioned so that the Truck Babies literally look up to them. From this location of power, the girls speak with a maternal authority. The girls make comments that give straightforward traffic instructions and also deliver lines that offer advice in the form of the proverb or "wise old saying." 'Do not overtake', for example, suggests maternity in the "commonsense" instruction that traditionally is the role of the mother as the child's "first teacher". Shades of this teaching position inflect the other lines which also carry the weight of moral instruction as the maternal is conventionally tied to the teaching and policing of culturally specific values, beliefs and ethical conduct. All of the girls' comments indicate their position as nurturers who care for the Truck Babies' physical and social welfare as well as their moral development.

As with much of Piccinini's work, within the installation *Truck Babies* boundaries are blurred between animal, machine and human, young and old, as well as technology and maternity. The hypertext links in this work click from machine to animal back to adult (animal) to the cyborgean body of blurred boundaries, the Truck Baby. While the flickering significations of "nature", "animal" , "adult" and "child" beat across the installation, the Truck Babies, themselves are machines. Truck Babies are reminiscent

---

[129] *Australia's Funniest Home Videos*, Channel 9, 2008, currently screening Saturdays 6.30pm..

of images of the euro-bubble shaped car prevalent during the 1950s. The infantilizing of the real-life truck shapes has the effect of producing the solidly chunky shape of some 1950s cars as opposed to the sleek lines and colours that are generally darker and/or more metallic of contemporary vehicles. This evocation of a past era produces an aura of nostalgia that clings to the highly polished surface of the cars. Truck Babies are the product of cutting edge technologies but their generously rounded curves and overly polished sheen are also reminiscent of 1950s vintage cars that have been carefully restored by avid collectors to beyond their former glory.

For Piccinini the Truck Babies are the offspring of the huge trucks that she saw during her travels from New Orleans to Niagra Falls.[130] A process of familiarization with the trucks that were her companions on the road trip enabled the artist to imagine them as enormous whales, "the only real 'wildlife' that I [Piccinini] saw on my journey. In fact when I did see deer, they were the ones that seemed artificial or out of place."[131] For the artist, the simulacra are the real and the real-life animals are the image against a rapidly moving background. This process is a kind of techno-transubstantiation whereby the artist's lived experience of a kind of companionship with trucks on busy highways produces the cyborg bodies of imagined infantilised vehicles. Rendered synthetically organic, the Truck Babies are solid images of the parent vehicles: their cyborg bodies are grounded in the nature of "wildlife". They are, according to Piccinini, the machine equivalent of the whale, a well-known symbol in the realm of popular culture signifying 'wilderness', unmediated nature or 'freedom'.[132]

The flickering signification of animal - a *coming from* animal rather than a *becoming* animal in the Deleauzean sense- reflects through Piccinini's widely stated imaginings concerning the animalization of American trucks. Truck Babies are not in the process of becoming or moving towards a state of being animal as the movement is from animal towards animalized machine. Traces of whale and dog are suggested by the characteristics of the infant trucks' bodies and finishes. Animal, in particular whale, is signified in the curves and humps of the Truck Babies' bodies. The voluptuous curving of the bodies, especially the generous curves of the buttocks are

---

[130] Piccinini, *Truck Babies Artist Statement*

[131] Ibid.

[132] Ibid.

reminiscent of a great deal of documentary footage that displays the fleshy roundings of whales with sweeping camera shots.[133] Attentively, the Truck Babies listen to their mentor/mothers, appearing to sit on their rounded haunches with their chrome and lights cocked, like dogs at obedience school, ready to hear all the vital instructions. The trucks' lustrous gleam evokes traces of sparkling water, sunlight on the ocean disrupted by whales breaking the surface, as well as being indicative of glossy automobile finish. There is also a visual sense of movement through water, of swimming, as the viewer's gaze skims over the objects, sliding over the highly developed sheen that both invites and deflects the viewer's look. Thus, animal – especially whale- is signified by the evocation of habitat in the shine of water and also by the Truck Babies' positioning which resonates with the attentiveness and loyalty of dogs.

Within the significations of animal/whale/dog, are ruptured boundaries of child and adult. I argue that these machines have been infantilised and shaped according to notions of neoteny. This biological theory observes the persistence of infantile characteristics into adulthood. [134] Piccinini's artist statement concerning the Truck Babies supports this interpretation. She claims

> The Truck Babies are infantile not miniature; they have big cheeks and fat bottoms, little wheels and lovely big eyes ... I examined the relationship between babies and fully-grown animals and people and applied these developmental changes backwards to the trucks.[135]

The Truck Babies are literally smaller than a real life truck. Yet, as Piccinini writes in her artist statement regarding this work, they are not faithful representations of trucks shrunk to Lilliputian size.[136] In accordance with Piccinini's research into animals' biological developments from infant to adult, the Truck Babies' headlights (eyes) are large, their heads big and rounded, their bodies are plump and curved. Physically, their compact bodies and lovingly sculpted curves are reminiscent of baby animals. They appear to bestow whole bodied attention upon the words of advice meted out by the girls onscreen like children literally looking up to their mothers. This

---

[133] *The Blue Planet*, BBC series 2005, narrated by David Attenborough.

[134] *The Macquarie Dictionary*, Third Edition, edited by Arthur Delbridge, John Bernard, David Blair, Susan Butler, Pam Peters, and Colin Yallop (Sydney: Macquarie University, NSW, [1981], 1997), p. 1444.

[135] Piccinini, *Truck Babies Artist Statement*

attentiveness is physicalized in their positionings on the floor and the uprightness of antenna and lights on their rooves. As well as their infantile plump curves, the other major defining characteristic, the sheen that creeps across their bodies, speaks of newness, of new life and exciting beginnings.

Despite Piccinini's consistency in blurring the boundaries between animal and machine as well as child and adult, the infantilization of the trucks is faulty. Whilst Piccinini states that she has researched the developmental stages of human and animal growth from infancy in order to produce a feasible reproduction of a "baby truck", her useage of this material has a fundamental flaw. All human infants, and many immature animals have heads that are proportionally large in comparison with their bodies. This is to house the vitally important brain, enabling humans to adapt to a wide variety of experiences and habitats. Piccinini's Truck Babies have large heads but their buttocks are the body part that dominates their anatomy rather than their skulls. Despite Piccinini's insistence that she has researched developmental stages of human and animal growth and based her artwork upon her findings she has chosen to ignore the basic biological rule regarding head/body ratios. And so despite Piccinini's statement that her artwork is based in tenets of animal and human biology this is not the case.

The partial infantilization of the trucks leads to a problematized gendering and corporealization of the babies. Both Truck Babies are obviously gendered. This clear gendering is signified by the use of the colours pink and blue which traditionally link the objects with notions of femininity and masculinity. The inevitable matchingness of the pair of Truck Babies circumscribes the objects designated female and male in an economy of compulsory heterosexuality. However, the bodies are identical so that Truck Baby girl is female only as far as the surface of her pale pink ducco just as Truck Baby boy is male on the surface. While this produces a mild critique of conventional gender roles and gendered practices of child rearing – Truck Babies are differentiated only by colour – the identicalness of the truck physicalities defaults to two conventional possibilities. The first leads back to the normative form of body in western discourse: the male body. Male truck body, therefore, becomes the default dominant of the artwork. The second possibility, equally relying on notions of the

---

[136] Ibid.

traditional, notes the truck babies' cuteness and their infantilization, however partial, and renders them feminine.

Despite the reversion to a male dominated truck corporeality or infantilized feminine in several possible readings of *Truck Babies*, other meanings hypertext from this node to continue the work's challenging of conventional narratives, borders and boundaries. Just as the installation disrupts divisions between animal, machine, human, adult and child it also works to dissolve boundaries between maternity and technology. This troubling of traditional borders between maternity and technology plays out in the maternal role that the teenage girls adopt in relation to the truck babies. While the piece, *Still Life With Stem Cells* offers a little-girl maternal figure, images of the Tokyo girls construct a Big Sister maternity. The truck babies gaze adoringly up at the girls, bestowing maternal authority on the teenagers. The girls assume the role of older sister/mother by talking to the infants and offering them a variety of sayings and advice. The advice that appears in print on screen is interspersed with brief shots of trucks against purple, blue or 'real-life' backgrounds. In their canine-like attentiveness to the girls on the monitors, the Truck Babies, literally looking up to them, clearly adore their "big sisters"/mothers.

In one hypertextual moment, the girls' engagement with the boundary blending Truck Babies is a powerful rewriting of traditional tropes of western maternity as "natural" and tied to biology. The girls' association with technology traverses the conventional divide that binds men to technology while women, especially female maternal bodies, are tied to nature. Images of the teenage girls fills the screens that Truck Baby and viewer attention is directed towards and their advice indicates that they possess both knowledge about and have devised their own philosophy concerning the adult versions of the machines who are listening to them. Thus, femininity is associated with knowledge, wisdom – delivered via technology - and the mind as opposed to the conventional roping of masculinity to knowing while females are traditionally tied to their biology and nature.

Conventional representations of maternity as staid, private and beyond the teen years are overturned. The girls' display of maternal affection and advice is public rather than limited to the private sphere – traditionally the domain of domesticated maternity. Feminist academic, Gail Reekie's argues that the figure of the "teenage

mother" is persistently constructed as a threat to bourgeois society.[137] Competent advice-giving by the teenagers ruptures popular cultural notions of foolish, incompetent, headstrong and promiscuous teenage mothers who are a drain on society's resources.

The girls also present themselves as funky, cute and fashion-cognizant figures. Their slender bodies link in with Susan Bordo's analysis concerning dominant discourses tying slim coporealities to narratives of morality and upperclassness.[138] This blend of maternal authority and knowledge as well as youthful hipness and cuteness overcomes ubiquitous representations of mothers as old-fashioned figures, belonging to the home, out-of-step with contemporary culture because they are so focused upon the main imperative in their lives: the care of their child(ren).[139] The techno-hip funky-cute girls are the savvy antithesis of depictions of the somewhat matronly average mum.[140]

Big-Sister maternity in *Truck Babies* also disrupts another dominant representation of maternity in western culture that hinges upon race. As the girls are Japanese, they do not fulfil the fantasy of white maternity for white western audiences. In this depiction of raced maternity, unlike historical discourses of race and class, non-whiteness is not depicted in terms of infection and contagion.[141] Instead, the Japanese girls are shown as confident and cheerful in their maternal roles. Piccinini's choice of Japanese girls also hypertexts to dominant western narratives of "Asian" technological prowess.[142] And perhaps in the use of Japanese mentor/mothers for the truck babies,

---

[137] Gail Reekie, *Measuring Immorality: Social Inquiry and the Problem of Illegitimacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[138] Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, pp. 185-210.

[139] Caroline Myra Pascoe, *Screening Mothers: Representations of Motherhood in Australian Films 1900 to 1988*. Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. University of Sydney. September, 1998. Thesis available at http://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/bitstream/2123/385/11/adt-NU1999.0010chapter8.pdf. See also Catriona Elder, *Being Australian: Narratives of National Identity*, Crows Nest, N.S.W: Allen and Unwin, 2008), pp. 77-78.

[140] Ibid.

[141] Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*, (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997), p. 1

[142] Charles R. Taylor and Ju Yung Lee, 'Not in Vogue: Portrayals of Asian Americans in Magazine Advertising', *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, Vol. 13, Iss. 2, Fall 1994, pp. 239-245.

Piccinini is looking towards her non-white audiences especially the contemporary art market of Japan where she has recently exhibited work.

In addition, the techno girls onscreen are not only representative of femininity linked with technology, their positioning within the frame of the monitor also enacts a re-writing of Lacan's account of coming into language.[143] The girls onscreen assume the role of the male law and language giver of Lacanian thought. Thus, the female mentor/mothers take on the task of imparting language in the words of advice they bestow upon the Truck Babies.

While the previous readings of *Truck Babies* note overturnings of conventions of maternity and race, other hypertexted interpretations of the installation observe the evocation of traditional representations of maternal bodies in the sculpted physical and associative significations concerning conventional 1950s popular culture. The features that contribute to this interpretation include elements such as the shape of the trucks, reminiscent of vintage Ford cars, and the "matchingness" of the trucks which is suggestive of salt and pepper shakers of the same era. These aspects of the work activate invisible loops back to conventional images of maternity as private, domesticated, acquiescent and all-giving. Thus, the flickering significations of 1950s artefacts imbues the cute/sexy techno body of the Truck Baby with nuances of the 'solid' physical presence of sturdily manufactured vehicles and the equally 'solid' nuclear family values. Traces of the comfortable, if a little kitsch, domesticity raised by the image of matching infant creatures thread through the monstrous boundary bending of the Truck Babies.

The marked evocations of 1950s conservative popular ideology sits uncomfortably with the dynamism of the onscreen maternal mentors and produces a two-fold movement that loops back to discourses of traditional maternity. In the first part of this process the monstrousness suggested by the girls' boundary-breaching challenges to normative discourses of motherhood is terminated by the predominance of narratives of mid-twentieth-century convention. These narratives return the monstrous maternity

---

[143] Anika Lemaire, Trans. David Macey, *Jacques Lacan*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, [1970], 1977), pp. 51-57. Maryse Touboul, 'Politics, Culture and Language: Jacques Lacan and the Symbolic Language Then, Now and Hereafter', *All Academic Research*, 2008, available at http://www.allacademic.com//meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/0/4/7/2/pages204728/p204728-1.php, date accessed 7/7/2008.

of transgression to historical associations of the monster with the non-white, the "foreign" and (m)otherhood. Surrounded by suggestions of mainstream 1950s culture and contained within the limits of the screen, the Big Sisters could be added to Braidotti's discussion of the monster and embodied differences as contemporary examples of dominant narratives of teratology.

The second part of this movement from subversive to traditional maternity refers to the focus on the infant rather than maternal bodies. While the techno girls are an integral part of the installation, the viewer's eye is drawn predominantly to the Truck Babies themselves so that the focus is on the infants not on their maternal mentors. This positioning echoes a great deal of academic and popular literature which focuses on the child and his/her development rather than maternal subjectivity. The drawing of the gaze away from the youthful insurrections of maternity and towards the 1950s inflected objects re-places the flickering significations of traditional representations of motherhood back on to the Truck Babies. This linking away from subversion and back towards the conventional short circuits the processes of hypertext by forming backward travelling loops rather than forging rhizomatic connections of multiple possibilities. Thus, the multiplicitous nodes of rhizomatic cybercultural space and all the potential for opening up discussion on these topics are limited by the reinscription of traditional notions of maternal images.

The Young Family

The Young Family (2002) (Figure 16, 22 and 23, pp 233 and 276)[144] was first exhibited at the *Retrospectology* exhibition and formed the centrepiece for Piccinini's display at the Venice Biennale (2003) where she represented Australia. This installation foregrounds a scientifically engineered maternal body which I will refer to as the mother creature. She has been variously described as sow-like, dugongesque, or a combination of ape, pig and human.[145] In this work the mother creature reclines, exhausted after giving birth, and suckles three of her four offspring. One of the baby creatures lies belly-up, displaying genitals which reveal a female sex. Four

---

[144] Figure 21: New Mother and Child and Figure 22: Opposable Thumb sourced from Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, available at http://www.roslynoxley9.com.au/artists/31/Patricia_Piccinini/249/, date accessed 21/10/09.

[145] See Boyd, 2003, p. 68; Engberg, 2002, p. 49; Faulkner, 2002, p. 3; Nelson, 2003, p. 17.

Page 276 has been removed for copyright or proprietary reasons.

Figure 21: New Mother and Child, and,
Figure 22: Opposable Thumb
sourced from Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, available at
http://www.roslynoxley9.com.au/artists/31/Patricia_Piccinini/249/
date accessed 21/10/09.

appendages are positioned at the end of the mother creature's legs, like feet, but they possess opposable thumbs – a marker of human identity.

It is significant that Piccinini based her collection of pieces for the Venice Biennale around the mother creature and called the entire exhibition "We Are Family". Curator, Juliana Engberg describes the artwork as follows:

> "The Young Family" is serene, extended, and plentiful. Even though they are not of our species it is clear they share certain characteristics with us: the good ones. The Young Family appears to possess tenderness and a sense of communion: it conveys love. The new family is different these days. Whether biological, social, or selected, produced from blended families or the kibbutz, it is enlarged by a new concept of inclusiveness that can only return us to values of community. This may be mythology, but Piccinini makes it seem mighty real.[146]

Through a scientifically-engineered excess of flesh, the body of the mother creature inhabits the monstrous maternal. Although the surface is inviting to the touch, it is, in reality, composed of silicone which feels cold and surprisingly alien to the fingertips. This maternal body is a field of interplay, connectivity and flickering signification. Mobilized and enfolded through the creases and lines of the maternal body, narratives of contemporary science interact and morph. The stories that loom in both popular and academic discourses that are suggested by this work include surrogacy, donor sperm or eggs, in vitro fertilization (IVF), gamete intrafallopian transfer (GIFT), and zygote intrafallopian transfer (ZIFT). These narratives are also strongly entwined within western notions of reproductive technologies, consumerism, and, feminist discourses of career and family.

Strong feminist criticism of the potential usage of contemporary biotechnologies continues to surface in current debate and literature. An example of this kind of social commentary occurs in Margaret Atwood's recent novel, *Oryx and Crake*.[147] Atwood constructs creatures like the headless chicken with many breasts, suitable for fast food production, and the transgenic pig which is scientifically engineered to grow human-tissue organs in order to make these valuable products available for transplant operations. These trans-species creations are ominous and threatening rather than

---

[146] Juliana Engberg, *Retrospectology: the World According to Patricia Piccinini*, Australian Centre For Contemporary Art, 2002, Catalogue, p. 43.

[147] Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, (N.S.W: Doubleday Books, 2003).

innocuous and domesticated. For instance, the pig-creature eventually escapes and poses a threat rather than being of service to humanity.

It is useful to maintain a hypertextual awareness of these narrative threads while the body of the mother-creature continues to flicker before us. Flickering significations of assisted reproductive technologies interconnect and form random patterns of possibility. One or many combinations of contemporary reproductive and assisted technologies as well as cross-species genetic engineering could be the creating factor(s) involved in the production of the mother creature which approaches the alien and the abject. In the interplay of narrative, practice and artwork, traditional tropes of maternity are both ruptured and reinscribed.

The mother creature and her babies form a techno-tableau enmeshed in circuits of desire and maternity. Flesh tones imbued with the vibrancy of a Titian painting and a weary recumbency that is the central focus of the piece conjured in my mind connections between religious art, especially paintings of the madonna and child as well as manger scenes.[148] Instead of straw or ornate furnishings as a background, however, the creature rests upon a vinyl-like substance reminiscent of car dashboards and is, itself, formed from a synthetic material - silicone. These juxtapositions trouble categories of nature and culture.

Even though this privileging of what is considered to be the natural could enact a reinscription of conventional binaries of nature/culture, the actual effect of the composition of the art work challenges traditional tropes of maternity. The obviously constructed and synthetic qualities of the representation of a scientifically engineered life-form plays with and undercuts the piece's elements of conventional and canonical representations of maternity - birthing without medical intervention and suckling the creatures as well as the traces of Renaissance inspired tones and the placement of the figures.

From the ACCA gallery guides, I learned that Piccinini's view of the piece revolves around the notion that the mother creature is the product of inter-species and

---

[148] The Renaissance painter Tiziano Vecellio, popularly known as Titian, (1485-1576) was renowned for his vivid and colourful paintings. His work usually focused on religious and mythological themes. See Nicholas Pioch, 'Titian' *Web Museum*, October 14, 2002, available at http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/titian/, date accessed 2/8/08.

perhaps genetic engineering and her offspring are the result of a "natural"- unassisted - labour. This interpretation is supported in official literature such as The Australia Council Newsletter that described the creature with animalistic imagery as "a trans-species mother with a litter of suckling offspring".[149] The narrative of "natural" birth and scientifically engineered origin merging the organic and the inorganic is also upheld in the majority of art reviews of Piccinini's work. For instance, art critic Chris Boyd, proclaims in *The Australian Financial Review* that the mother creature "is both admirable and grotesque, at once lovable and loathsome. It's no less worthy of our respect for its dubious genesis."[150] Art critic, Robert Nelson's take on the mother creature is even more steeped in narratives of conventional maternity slightly overlaid by discourses of scientific advance as he describes the mother-creature as "a gentle quadruped with hands for feet, pig's belly, buffalo's ears, ape's muzzle and grandmother's eyes. This superior, benign and sage creature suckles her young in peace".[151]

Although the mother creature is described as appealingly abject, the excess and fleshiness of the monster also evokes elements of dominant discourses of racialized class. Writing in the nineteenth century, Frederick Engels describes the working class as "a physically degenerate race, robbed of all humanity, degraded, reduced morally and intellectually to bestiality".[152]. Beverley Skeggs contends that "the working classes (Black and White) ... (have) consistently been classified as dangerous, polluting, threatening, revolutionary, pathological and without respect".[153] Lynette Finch delineates the conceptualisation and division of the discursively constructed "working-class" into the respectable and non-respectable working classes. The construction of the respectable working-class is dependent upon the idea of a hardworking poor who aspire to middle class ideals of behaviour. Conversely, those

---

[149] *Ozco_News*, The Australia Council Newsletter, Issue 2_May 2003, produced by the Communication Unit, the Australia Council, Sydney, Australia. Available online at www.ozco.gov.au

[150] Chris Boyd, 'Visions of a Strange New World', *The Australian Financial Review*, January 4, 2003, p. 68.

[151] Robert Nelson, 'Clever Technology, Serious Questions', *The Age*, Saturday, January 4, 2003, Arts p. 17.

[152] Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England*, (St. Albans, Hertz: Panther, 1844/1958), p. 33.

[153] Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender*, pp. 2-6.

classified as the not-respectable working class are categorised as promiscuous, unclean, threatening and contagious.

Historically the discursive formations of class and race are strongly intermeshed. Anne McClintock argues that race as a category is constructed and intertwined with conceptualisations of class in nineteenth-century depictions of domestic servants within a "racialized iconography of degradation".[154] Conventionally, European art from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries depicts classed and raced representations in terms of domination/superiority of white bourgeois power in contrast to the submissiveness of images of classed and racialized workers.[155]

I argue that dominant discourses of race, class and mothering aligned with monstrosity that play across the body of the mother-creature close down the disruption of traditional tropes of maternity promised by threads of the monstrous in the installation. The possibility of overturning dominant discourse suggested by the monstrousness of the mother-body is located in the transgression of boundaries of species, body and family. I contend that the mother-creature stands for a technologised version of conventional depictions of the working class defined in contrast to historical descriptions of the rational, educated, materially successful middle-class. The monstrous maternal being has laboured to produce a litter of techno-animals that could be used to improve human health or in the process of further scientific experimentation. In this useage and the exhausted and somewhat submissive slump of the body there are suggestions of the servant. In contrast to the servant-like purpose to which the mother-creature is put, this monster is also a disturbing and frightening entity. The mother-creature's human and animal characteristics, excessive flesh, and numerous offspring suggest traces of the "bestial", "polluting, threatening" working class that stand "without respect" for middle-class norms of boundaries and containment.[156] In one reading of this representation of monstrous maternity, labour is the work of giving birth and maternity. It is, yet again, tied to flesh which is compelled by discourses of science and culture to produce offspring. As maternal bodies are

---

[154] Ibid, p. 5.

[155] Richard Leppert, *Art and the Committed Eye: The Cultural Functions of Imagery*, (Boulder: Westview/HarperCollins, 1996), pp. 173-209.

[156] Engels, *Working Class in England*, p. 33 and Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender*, p. 1.

historically associated with the monstrous, Piccinini merely reinstates the notion of maternity as already always aligned with the body and monstrosity.

In addition to displaying traces of historical notions of racialized class and mothering, the mother-creature's body is abject due to its immersion in the monstrous as well as its maternity. Julia Kristeva describes the abject chiefly in terms of maternal bodies who give birth.[157] According to Kristeva, the flesh of maternity "does not respect borders, positions, rules" and it "disturbs identity, system and order" as maternal bodies are "The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite."[158] For Kristeva, maternal bodies are critical sites of abjection as they embody strong flows of ambiguity being both the original source of life for the infant as well as the means by which the child comes to be made part of humanity's inevitable cycle of birth, life and death.[159]

The mother-creature enacts Kristevan corporealizations of the abject body which is complicated by a fleshy monstrosity.[160] This mother-creature's body is abject: swells of flesh belly out to almost engulf the pups. Borders appear to collapse in a swelter of flesh. Species boundaries are also transgressed as the creature is obviously a product of trans-species reproduction. The monstrous is present in the scientific interference in the processes of species reproduction that has occurred in the efforts to create the creature from a juxtaposition of animal and human biological materials. Familiar and alien, the mother-creature is in the process of becoming monster and becoming maternal.

Just as Kristeva's notion of the mother/child bond challenges the idea of inevitable separation, Piccinini's mother creature fleshes out this subversive bonding.[161] There is little separation in this techno-tableau. In a monstrous maternal merging, pups suckle at the mother's breasts. From a distance the bodies meld together into a solid peaks and troughs of sculpted flesh. Only one pup, the recent addition of the baby girl, lies

---

[157] Julia Kristeva, 'Approaching Abjection' in Amelia Jones (ed.), *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader.*(London: Routledge, [1980], 2003), pp. 389-391.

[158] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of* Horror: An Essay on Abjection, Trans. Leon Roudiez. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 4.

[159] Ibid.

[160] Kristeva, (2003), pp. 389-391.

[161] Julia Kristeva, 'Motherhood According to Bellini' in Kelly Oliver (ed.), *The Portable Kristeva.* (New York: Columbia University Press, [1975], 1997), pp. 295-307.

separately from the rest of the litter. Even she looks as if she is on the verge of rolling back to the mother creature. The abjection and meldings of this scene of the monstrous maternal acts as a conductor for the interplay of discourses of technology and maternity.

Cute Monstrosity

In this section I explore one particular coming together of two of the main features of Piccinini's work – monstrosity and cuteness and the effect this intertwining has on the reception of the artwork. Piccinini's intermeshing of the monstrous and cuteness are not the only coming together in her artwork but one that I find plausible, fascinating, appealing and disturbing. I call it "monstrous cute" – a blending of influences and nuances of monstrosity and cuteness. Regarding meldings of monstrous and cute elements I ask the question - how do these two work together in the economy of art objects that are purported to be offering challenges to contemporary thinking, especially current debate concerning new technologies? Another question I ask concerning Piccinini's work considers viewer response to the aesthetic of monstrous cute - "Is it possible to critique commercialism whilst also succumbing to the glossy appeal of well packaged commodities?" Or are we only ever able to see ourselves reflected in the super-shiny surfaces of Piccinini's art work? This section focuses on one possible reading of Piccinini's work – a strand of monstrous cute in a hypertextual moment that encompasses almost infinite potentialities.

The bodies evident in Piccinini's artwork are not only mutant and monstrous, their ample curves, dimples, high gloss finishes, large eyes and synthetic material display a cuteness that, for the most part, would be welcomed on the drawing boards of both Disney studios and Hallmark, Inc. Art critic Mark Pennings writes that "the cute element is central" to Piccinini's work which he claims is "a kind of upmarket Koonsian kitsch which must seduce, if only for that glorious 'moment'."[162] In everyday parlance "cute" refers to objects described as sweet, innocent, dainty, naïve and/or childlike. It is closely associated with the notion of "twee", an adjective that refers to particular objects as "small and sweet: sentimentally pretty".[163] Cute refers to

---

[162] Pennings, p. 564.

[163] *Chambers 20th Century Dictionary*, New Edition, edited by Elizabeth McLaren Kirkpatrick. (Edinburgh: W & R Chambers Ltd, 1983), p. 1396.

childlike qualities such as curving cheeks, sturdy limbs, proportionally large eyes, and small mouths. It trades upon notions of the familiar - family, children - and desires to return to an imagined state of childhood innocence and naivety. The word "cute" is commonly thought of as a positive term, perhaps even a compliment, for example, "Look at that adorable child/puppy/kitten. Isn't it cute!"

I argue that notions of what is cute regarding cultural artefacts are closely associated with the idea of kitsch. The idea of kitsch popularly imbues an art object with negative connotations of being quaint, old fashioned and/or in what is popularly considered "poor taste".[164] Even though kitsch is generally considered to lack aesthetic appeal academic Stephen Linstead contends that it "retains some sort of mildly perverse attractiveness. It prettifies the problematic, makes the disturbing reassuring, and establishes an easy (and illusory) unity of the individual and the world".[165] For instance, the puppy/kitten/child previously described as cute carries that label while frolicking in a park but if that tableau is represented on a calendar, the scene is rendered as kitsch. Therefore, kitsch is the overly sentimentalized representation of cute that does not necessarily lean as heavily on aspects of childlikeness. While notions of "cute" or "kitsch" could be described in positive (the kitten in a park) and negative (the kitten on a calendar) terms in everyday popular images, the two concepts are firmly intertwined in considerations of artworks. Both cute and kitsch art are conventionally perceived as in "poor taste".

Cute art is a phenomenon chiefly of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.[166] Academic and art critic, Gary Genosko writes that

> The current trend of cute art owes a great debt to kitsch. Kitsch may exploit cuteness for commercial purposes, but the commercial exploitation of cuteness and sentimentality in general is a matter of serious concern for what is called the 'industry for social expression'. Cuteness circulates around interpersonal relations in many people's everyday lives in the form of greeting cards and their family of related products.[167]

Cute and kitsch are closely interconnected. Both are generally considered to be 'low-brow' expressions of popular and sentimentalized common artefacts such as

---

[164] Stephen Linstead, 'Organizational Kitsch', *Organization,* Vol. 9, No. 4, 2002, pp. 657-682.

[165] Ibid, p. 657.

[166] Gary Genosko, 'Cute Art', *Border Crossings*, v 18, no 4, Nov, 1999,p. 12. (12-14).

[167] Ibid.

matching salt and pepper shakers, kewpie dolls, and plastic blow up toys to name just a brief selection of cute and kitsch objects. Defined against 'high-brow' art, cute and kitsch works are often described in art and/or academic journals as something to escape from, go beyond or rise above.[168]

Another notion also associated with ideas of cute and kitsch is the concept of nostalgia. Generally, nostalgia has been perceived by academics in terms of preoccupation with a utopian past and a "cheap" kitsch that is an effective marketing and advertising tool.[169] Nostalgia, then "seduces rather than convinces".[170] It is currently being re-constructed as a diverse aesthetic that possesses the potential to affect a subject's lived experience.[171] Critic Stuart Tannock argues that nostalgia

> ... invokes a positively evaluated past world in response to a deficient present world. The nostalgic subject turns to the past to find/construct sources of identity, agency, or community that are felt to be lacking, blocked, subverted, or threatened in the present. The "positively evaluated" past is approached as a source for something now perceived to be missing;

---

[168] Genosko, 'Cute Art', pp. 12-14. See also Jennifer Ehrenberg, 'Beyond Cute: Hallmark Greeting Cards', *Print*, v 50, July/Aug, 1996, pp. 52-61. See also Fumio, Nanjo, 'Dangerously cute: Noi Sawaragi and Fumio Nanjo discuss contemporary Japanese Culture', *Flash Art* (International Edition), no 163, Mar/Apr, 1992, pp. 75-77.

[169] See the following: Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, (Minneapolis: Univeristy of Minnesota Press, 1996); Richard Bauman, "Contextualization, Tradition, and the Dialogue of Genres: Icelandic Legends and the Kraftaskald." In *Rethinking Context: Language as Interactive Phenomenon*, edited by Alessandro Duranti and Charles Goodwin, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 125-45; Dan Ben-Amos, 'The Seven Strands of Tradition: Varieties in Its Meaning in American Folklore Studies', *Journal of Folklore Research*, 21 (2-3),1984, pp. 97-132; Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, (New York: New York Free Press, 1979); Henry Glassie, "Tradition", In *Eight Words for the Study of Expressive Culture*, edited by Burt Feintuck, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), pp. 176-197; David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Tad Tuleja, (ed)., *Usable Pasts: Traditions and Group Expressions in North America*, (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1997).

[170] Svetlana Boym, cited in Janelle L. Wilson's *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning*, (Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 2005), p. 8.

[171] Debbora Battaglia, "On Practical Nostalgia: Self-Prospecting among Urban Trobrianders." In *Rhetorics of Self-Making*, edited by Debbora Battaglia,. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) pp. 77–96; George Behlmer, Introduction. In *Singular Continuities: Tradition, Nostalgia, and Identity in Modern British Culture*, ed. George Behlmer, Fred Leventhal, and F. M. Leventhal, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000) pp. 1–10; Alison .Blunt, "Collective Memory and Productive Nostalgia: Anglo-Indian Homemaking at McCluskieganj." *Environment and Planning* 21, 2003, pp. 717–38. Ray Cashman, 'Critical Nostalgia and Material Culture in Northern Ireland', *Journal of American Folklore*, 119, 472, 2006, pp. 137-160; Kimberly Smith, 'Mere Nostalgia: Notes on a Progressive Paratheory'. *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 3,4, 2000, pp. 505–27; Stuart Tannock. 'Nostalgia Critique', *Cultural Studies* 9 (3), 1995, pp. 453–64.

> but it need not be thought of as a time of general happiness, peacefulness, stability, or freedom.[172]

Anthropologist and folklore academic Ray Cashman furthers this definition by claiming that nostalgia is able to evoke responses that shift from the internal and the imaginary to the public sphere of social and political action.[173] Cashman cites examples of narratives of nostalgia being mobilized to enable communities to merge discourses of the past and the present in a time of cultural, social and political change.[174]

I argue that the nostalgia which tints Piccinini's artworks functions in a hypertextual moment that questions and yet draws upon binaries of nature/culture and harmonious history/uncertain present. This hyperlink works to transport the viewer from the technologised present along links activated by shapes, colours and suggestions of past eras to new imagined worlds parallel to the present/future. For example, the Truck Babies' generous curves are reminiscent of the rounded vehicles of the 1950s. Yet, the infant trucks inhabit a domain where binaries of machine/human and animal/human are disrupted. Nostalgia also assists in the examination and extension of the technological subjects of Piccinini's artwork beyond the domain of imagination to provoke discussion about these matters. For instance, *The Young Family* speaks of nostalgia-tinged desires for a mythical "olden days" of large families and rural-based living. The family in the installation, however, is the result of a number of contemporary reproductive technologies which poses questions concerning bioethics, commerce and definitions of humanity.

Combinations of nostalgia, the familiar, child-like desire and cute art are currently most closely associated with the work of artist Jeff Koons. He is renowned for the shiny surfaces of his art objects, such as the iconic *Rabbit* (1986), one of his early works, in which stainless steel is moulded and stretched to form the shape of an inflatable plastic toy rabbit. In a similar vein, Koons' monument of a sculpture, *Puppy* (1992), employs an aesthetic of cute. Even though it towers over forty feet high, the skeletal framework of *Puppy* is composed of various flowers. His more recent artwork, *Dolphin,* exhibited in the Sonnabend Gallery, New York, 2002, is comprised

---

[172] Stuart Tannock, p. 454.

[173] Ray Cashman, p. 138.

[174] Ibid.

of a child's plastic blow-up toy dolphin suspended by chains from the ceiling.[175] Attached to the dolphin's belly by means of hooks and metal framework a variety of kitchen utensils as well as pots and pans are hung. Koons' latest exhibition at Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art, July 2008, also displays his trademark combinations of cute, kitsch and nostalgia.[176] It features a bright red lobster sculpture, a shiny blue heart, balls suspended in fishtanks filled with water, a large figure of a dachshund made from orange tinted stainless steel, and a blown-up photograph of the artist aged seven with his Crayola set.[177] These artworks embrace an aesthetic of cute that use children's toys and highly reflective surfaces to comment on commodification and consumption – the buzz words of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century culture – aligned with a nostalgic harking back to a familiar space of innocent childhood simplicity and revelry. As art critic, Thyrza Nichols Goodeve writes, "Make-believe is the engine of late capitalism; giddiness is its preferred consumptive spirit."[178]

As Jeff Koons critical and commercial success demonstrates cute art is gaining recognition from both the art world and the general public. As well as becoming more established as an art form and/or aspect of artistic endeavours cute art is also firmly enmeshed in narratives of commercialism. In an article that underlines the potential financial rewards for producing cute objects the art writer Jennifer Ehrenberg relates a story told by Fred Klemuschin, a Hallmark greeting card manager. She outlines his recollection:

> "I remember working on this little character that had a top knot and big huge eyes and I just hated her", recalls Fred Klemuschin ... about his early days at the company as a "cute" line artist. His manager was unsympathetic. "That little bleeping character that you hate," he replied, "is bringing in millions."

---

[175] Donald Goddard, 'Jeff Koons: What Art is to Begin With', Art Review, *New York Art World*, 2003, available at http://www.newyorkartworld.com/reviews/koons.html, date accessed 7/7/2005.

[176] Susan Stanberg, 'Jeff Koons has a "Ta-Da" Moment in Chicago', available at http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=92873040, *National Public Radio* Web site, (USA), date accessed 1/8/2008.

[177] Susan Stanberg, 'Jeff Koons has a "ta-da" moment in Chicago', available at http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=92873040, *National Public Radio* Web site, (USA), date accessed 1/8/2008.

[178] Thyrza Nichols Goodeve, 'Euphoric Enthusiasm: Jeff Koons's Celebration', *Parkett*, 50/51, 1997,p. 88.

> "You might perceive this to look kind of awful," explains Klemuschin, gesturing to a more contemporary cute product, "but people can't buy enough of this. They love it. They find it so appealing and charming ... Nancy Ornce, director of specialty design, agrees, adding, "We would love to do other things, but there's an incredible market for cute." Hallmark's response to this market – a savy mix of "cute" and "other" – has made them number one in the card business. [179]

Moving from considerations of a "cute" aesthetic in the domains of art and commerce to the political sphere, Czech writer Milan Kundera details a politics of kitsch in his novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.[180] He identifies many variations such as feminist, Catholic, Protestant, Communist, democratic, Fascist, international and national kitsch. Within these different domains, Kundera posits that "fantasies, images, words, and archetypes ... make up this or that *political kitsch*".[181] According to Kundera, kitsch works to banish doubt, irony and questioning. It rests upon simple images collectively shared. To illustrate his notion of kitsch, Kundera uses the example of children running on grass and he refers to the shedding of "two tears" of sentiment. In his description of the double movement of kitsch, Kundera writes that

> Kitsch causes two tears to flow in quick succession. The first tear says: How nice to see children running on grass! The second tear says: How nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running on the grass! It is the second tear that makes kitsch kitsch.[182]

So, it is the second part of the double movement of kitsch that Kundera describes, the second tear, that effectively closes down further emotional response or debate on political, intellectual or ethical levels. Kundera captures a certain quality that I claim is possible in a monstrous cute reading of Piccinini's work.

While Kundera proposes a two-part revelation of kitsch, I argue that the deployment of a monstrous cute reading practice is revealed in a three part movement: the shock of recognition, an exhalation, and then a sealing closed. First, the viewer encounters a shock of recognition of the familiar and familial within the monstrous.

---

[179] Jennifer Ehrenberg, 'Beyond Cute: Hallmark Greeting Cards', *Print*, v 50, July/Aug, 1996, pp. 52-61.

[180] Thanks to Barbara Baird for directing me to Milan Kundera's concept of political kitsch.

[181] Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Translated from the Czech by Michael Henry Heim, (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), p. 250.

[182] Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, p. 244.

Second, this recognition is expressed physically in a rapid outrush of breath. This exhalation acknowledges a tacit approval for a temporary regression to a familiar childhood location. Thirdly, a seemingly involuntary exclamation closes down the possibility of further response to the object(s). Many responses from viewers at Piccinini's *Retrospectology* exhibition I attended a number of times in early 2003 provide examples of monstrous cute readings of her artwork.[183] Throughout the gallery, I witnessed viewers gazing intently at the creatures with expressions of puzzled recognition of a quality or element of the artwork that was familiar but not yet spoken. After this moment of seeing the familiar I frequently heard gasps or sighs from viewers and then the words that verbalised the process - "aww, look at that" or "oh my god, that's cute". These exhaled acknowledgments of cute spoke the transforming moment in which the shock of recognition for the viewer dissolves into the allowable momentary regression to a childhood of playing with toys and/or friends and siblings.

Shifting from the social to the textual, art critic, Benjamin Genocchio's description of the mother-creature of *The Young Family* also illustrates the three elements involved in responses to monstrous cute artworks. In a review in the *Weekend Australian* he writes that "Some will perceive it (mother-creature) as grotesque even frightening, but once you get over the initial shock of the bloated, fleshy body and deformed head, you realise that the creature is benign and is simply doing what comes naturally – caring for and suckling its young. This is a joyous work about love and procreation".[184] In this example, there is first the shock of realization of the monstrous. This is rapidly followed by the recognition of the familiar as the "benign" creature feeds her young. The last comment effectively closes down any further response by the pronouncement that the "real meaning" of the artwork is firmly located in a sphere of blissful domesticity and sentiment.

In a monstrous cute reading of *The Young Family*, Piccinini's mother creature's monstrosity is modified by the stopping of the hypertexting of possibilities at the hyperlink of cute appeal. Viewed through the lens of cute cartoon-like appeal, the mother-creature becomes a cuddly cross-species techno-Madonna. The large ears give

---

[183] *Retrospectology: The World According to Patricia Piccinini*, the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, Australia, 21st Decemeber 2002 – 2nd March 2003.

a cartoonish quality to the creature. This effect is also echoed in the long ears of her offspring that bestow a slightly comical air to the little creatures that is reminiscent of animation, especially children's cartoons. In a move that also maximises appeal, the eyes of the creature are created as rounded, luminous, blue (a marker of dominant western biology and culture) and unmistakably human. The mother creature's pups snuggle in to her, happily suckling, only one coyly gazes up at the viewer. A monstrous cute reading of this tableau of cute pups and mother nurturing her young short circuits debate concerning trans-species and genetic engineering.

Monstrous cute interpretations of Piccinini's other installations, *Truck Babies* and *Still Life with Stem Cells* also work to reinstate the conventional and shut down rather than open up discussion. For instance, the potential for debate on techno-scientific issues as well as the flickering significations of animal/human/machine cyborgean bodies are also stopped at the hyperlink of *Truck Babies*' monstrous cute appeal. A primary focus on the gloss and cute appeal of the installation truncates the possibilities for further exploration instead of making this link yet another means of click-linking. through the rhizomatic structures of the work's associations and meanings. "Monstrous Cute", with the emphasis on the appeal of cuteness is the overwhelming signification of this work. The artist, herself, exhibition catalogues, newspaper articles, as well as public reactions in art galleries all define the work as appealingly cute. Undeniably, this is a huge part of Piccinini's popularity - her appeal to a wide variety of gallery goers and people who may not ordinarily go to art exhibition spaces.

Piccinini states that her Truck Babies are

> Cute, desirable and seductive ... In the same way, consumer culture creates the beauty and desire that blinds you to the pollution, and other problems of the industry and economics that lie behind it. Trucks and cars represent for me the archetypal example of this process where contemporary consumer culture conjures desire out of nothing more than glossy surfaces and shiny chrome.[185]

The artist contends that her work is double-edged in its homage to and criticism of consumerist culture and unquestioning acceptance of technological advancements.

---

[184] Benjamin Genocchio, 'Genetically modified sculpture', *The Weekend Australian*, January 11-12, 2003, Arts R 21. 2003, p. 21.

[185] Patricia Piccinini, *Truck Babies Artist Statement*, available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/essay.php?id=11, date accessed 3/4/2002.

However, the slippery interfaces between critique and the reproduction of the consumeristic object of desire both challenge and reinscribe the desires Piccinini seeks to trouble. After all, sometimes the sparkling sheen of the *Truck Babies* is, in one reading of the piece, all that the dazzled viewer is able to see.

Just as a monstrous cute reading of *Truck Babies* closes off rather than opens up hypertexted possible meanings, this strand of interpretation limits discussion concerning Piccinini's *Still Life With Stem Cells.* While conventional constructions of childhood and maternity are troubled in *Still Life With Stem Cells* by mutated forms of scientific experimentations, they are also reinforced by feedback loops of desire and an aesthetic of monstrous cute based on a conventional maternal optic. It is the pivotal maternal gaze from the little girl-mother that transforms the stem cell creatures from abject monsters to lovable lumps of flesh. In turn, the maternal gaze enacts transformations of the stem cells from scientific objects of enquiry and debate to "monstrous cute" and appealing objects of desire. This maternally propelled visual movement potentially has the effect of silencing debate and truncating any discussion that may arise concerning the implications of stem cell research by the construction of a monstrous cute progeny. Thus, the displacement of a maternal type of desire from viewer to little girl gaze re-fashions the fleshy lumps from alienating monstrosity to Disney-cute. The curves of flesh, the echoes of human physicality, the embryonic veins and size of the creatures all combine to construct an aesthetic of appeal that renders the lumps as strange but adorable, robust but vulnerable. In the artwork, these little creatures are rendered as entirely worthy of a traditional mother-love. From the reactions of critics, the popular press and gallery-going public, the appeal of the stem cell creatures is as assured as a McDonald's toy tie-in with a popular animated children's film character. [186]

Responses to Piccinini's creatures from critics and gallery attendees support my argument that the recognition of the familiar and the familial in the monstrous performs a kind of transubstantiation upon the monstrosity that challenges or invites debate about issues relevant to contemporary technoscience. This process effectively

---

[186] Alison Barlacy, 'Send in the Clones', *Herald Sun*, December 17, 2002, p. 51. Chris Boyd, 'Visions of a Strange New World', *The Australian Financial Review*, January 4, 2003, p. 68. Julie Copeland,'Patricia Piccinini – Fleshy Creatures', *ABC Arts Online* available at http://www.abc.net.au/arts/visual/stories/s597714.htm, 2002, date accessed 5/7/2003. Joel

enacts a shutting down of response and discussion at the hyperlink of monstrous cute. It is not only in the responses to monstrous cute, however, that critical discussion of Piccinini's artwork is limited. As I have previously indicated in this chapter, academic responses to Piccinini's objects also tend to focus on her representations of possible outcomes of bio-technological experimentation. Piccinini does not explore in any detail potential futures or uses of these creatures or ethical concerns that may arise. These issues are not commented upon by reviewers and critics.

Subversion and Convention in a Hypertextual Moment

Patricia Piccinini's artworks contain rhizomatic playgrounds of meanings where discourses of convention are both questioned and upheld. Considerations of her work, however, that focus on a monstrous cute reading or her sly playfulness with narratives of natureculture ignore many other aspects of the objects. These ways of interpreting her artwork leave unexamined the elements that support rather than challenge dominant discourses and render a partial reading of the installations. As previously discussed academic Kim Toffoletti's concentration upon Piccinini's subversion of boundaries of bodies, species, and biotechnologies leaves unexplored the artist's reinstatement of some conventional narratives of gender, technology and maternity. In a similar vein, Donna Haraway's essay focusing on Piccinini's artwork speaks of familial love but does not engage with the maternal in the artist's work and, unlike much of her previous subtle and supple writings, lacks acknowledgement of the complex interplays between culture, nature, the material, reality and representation.

In contrast to the partial investigations of Piccinini's work offered by monstrous cute readings and focus on the subversive aspects of her artwork, academic Linda Williams, as previously mentioned, gives a more nuanced account of the objects.[187] First, Williams claims that Piccinini's objects are critically well received as they offer viewers insights into how a range of new technologies could be used and what kinds of creatures they might produce. These corporealizations of imagined techno-possibilities go some way towards assuaging prevalent contemporary concerns that

---

Gibson, 'The art of Cloning', *State of the Arts*, 2003, available at http://www.stateart.com.au/sota/visual/default.asp?fid=1688, date accessed 16/5/2004.

[187] Linda Williams, 'Spectacle or critique: reconsidering the meaning of reproduction in the work of Patricia Picinini', *Southern Review: Communication, Politics and Culture*, Vol 37, Iss 1, 2004, pp. 76-94.

informed discussion must occur regarding the possible effects of various biotechnologies. Part of this anxiety, according to Williams, is that the pace of technoscientific innovations tends to outstrip debate about the potential social impact of these advancements. Piccinini's techno-creatures are enfleshments of some of the possibilities of contemporary technoscience. While Piccinini's work suggests potential outcomes from biotechnological research and experimentation Williams argues that it does not offer critical and sustained analyses of the issues.

Williams contends that the lure of hyper-realism and Piccinini's induction by the mainstream media into the cult of celebrity contribute to the appeal of her art. Made by an extensive team of craftsworkers and artists, Piccinini's objects are remarkably life-like -"The overall effect is one of astonishing verisimilitude in the illusion of living flesh with all of its minute variations and natural imperfections".[188] The seductive appeal and accessibility of this hyper-realism is immediately noticeable in the responses of those viewing and writing about the art. Another factor that contributes to the appeal of Piccinini's artwork, Williams argues, is her construction as a "media darling" as mainstream press comment about her appearance, retell her "story", often photograph the artist alongside her work and accompany this with many columns of acclaim for her art. Williams also makes the point that even though she is a relatively new artist Piccinini is frequently aligned with extremely influential figures including the French painter Chardin and the iconic writer Mary Shelley. For Williams it is not justifiable to link Piccinini with Mary Shelley, the writer whose rich articulations of some of the vitally important issues of nature, culture, and science have haunted discussions of the implications of technoscience for nearly two hundred years. Williams argues that we need only turn to some of Piccinini's comments concerning her own work to understand the lack of fit in this comparison. For instance, Williams quotes Piccinini talking about her creatures: "I don't want to be God, but it's fun playing God, I just want to respond to what scientists are doing and say, well, here's my idea. If you can do it, I'm doing it too."[189]

Turning to the realm of popular culture, Williams suggests that this domain is a more appropriate location for Piccinini's work. She writes that "Rather than the writer (Shelley), or her own example of the work of scientists, a better analogy for

---

[188] Ibid, p. 84.

Piccinini's work might be the popular films made of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, with their special effects produced by a team of people".[190] Williams states clearly that she does not intend to attempt the reinstatement of the tired binary of high/low culture here, classifying Piccinini in the latter. New Media artists supposedly bridge a perceived gap between 'high' and 'low' culture, but I join with Williams in arguing that Piccinini's work is actually located in a playful, fun strand of popular culture that entertains while enacting both subversive and reaffirming takes on a number of contemporary issues. For Williams, Piccinini is an artist/manager who is dependent on the skill and collaborative abilities of a number of artists and technicians who remain largely unacknowledged. This depiction of the artist/manager stands in contrast to the popular concept of Piccinini as the individual artistic figure who mostly receives sole credit for collaborative artwork.

Williams' argument concerning placing Piccinini in the appropriate genre of appropriation and collaborative popular culture is important. Comparisons to such innovative and influential figures as Mary Shelley force Piccinini to carry the weight of producing iconic artwork that imaginatively subverts traditional notions of nature, culture, and technoscientific interventions. I argue that this is a burden that Piccinini's artwork is not able to assume. The appeal of Piccinini's art is basically due to the playful fun, glossy seductive surfaces and monstrous cute creatures. While Piccinini's artwork, in hypertextual moments, challenges entrenched dichotomised thought it also reaffirms dominant discourses of nature, culture and femininity. Discussions of her creatures that focus on the aspects of subversion acknowledge only one thread of the many strands of meanings that inform the work leaving others unexplored delivering an investigation that is ultimately limited. Even though it is easy to be seduced by the shiny surfaces, fascinating new technologies and monstrous cute creatures it also important to consider the elements of Piccinini's objects that confirm and reinstate the traditional. It is necessary to do this in order to write nuanced discussions of the work. The cultural and physical location of Piccinini's artwork - cyber(cultural)space - lends itself to readings encompassing the hypertextual moment. Piccinini's artwork inhabits multiplicitous cyber(cultural)space by virtue of subject matter, its interpretation and the new technologies involved in the literal construction of the installations.

---

[189] Ibid, p. 86.

[190] Ibid, p. 86.

Cyber(cultural)space is, of course, the realm where meanings continually form, interact, disconnect, and reconnect rhizomatically . In a hypertextual moment, contradictory meanings are held together even though, at specific times, some threads of interpretation are focused upon to the exclusion of others and therefore become dominant readings. Thus, Piccinini's slippery mutants live hypertextually in artworks that are undeniably seductive and subversive in one strand of meaning which is at times, in yet another reading, obscured by the conventional in the appeal of monstrous cute. As a result of social and textual responses that focus on a monstrous cute reading of the artworks the potential of the slippery mutants to challenge conventional discourses of maternity and technology is terminated. In this termination the possibilities of the cyber-realm for subverting traditional representations of maternal bodies remain unrealised.

Conclusion

Patricia Piccinini's artworks are corporealizations of tensions between the components of traditionally binarized pairs such as nature/culture and maternal bodies/technobodies. As cultural artefacts her creatures are located within the realm of cyber(cultural)space due to two main facets of the work. First, Piccinini's art is produced by a number of artists and trade workers who employ a range of contemporary technologies to create the objects. Second, the artwork makes material the numerous current discussions about cloning, stem cell research, and gene splicing to name only some of the biotechnologies. Piccinini's enmeshment in discourses of technoscience and cyber(cultural)space ensure that she is regarded by the public and reviewers alike as an artist who imaginatively and creatively engages with narratives of cutting-edge contemporary technologies. Comparisons of Piccinini to Mary Shelley, author of *Frankenstein*, mis-categorise the artist and her work. While almost two hundred years after publication Shelley's novel continues to inspire passionate debate and innovative texts like Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*, Piccinini's artwork is greeted with praise but only limited critical engagement with the objects. Linking the constantly morphing myth of *Frankenstein* to the seductive appeal of Piccinini's objects that challenge on one level and reinforce dominant discourses on another is to burden the slippery mutants with a weight of critical engagement in a number of issues that they cannot sustain. It is also to miss the sheer pleasure and fun of Piccinini's creatures. Critiqueing Piccinini's art is work that is just as slippery as her engaging

mutants as the objects are saturated with numerous, sometimes contradictory meanings. The artist, herself, is constructed by responses from the general public, reviewers and academics alike as a Media Madonna or "media darling". This fan-like response to Piccinini and the failure to critique her work tend to focus on the objects' appeal and the challenge that they pose to conventional discourse while ignoring the ways in which the creatures reaffirm dominant narratives.

Although the reviews and articles about Piccinini concentrate on her drawing upon narratives of technology, family and familial love the writers are oddly silent about one of the major influences and threads in her artwork – maternity. I argue that Piccinini's installations are drenched in narratives of maternal bodies and becomings. The maternal becomings I identify in her work include those of little-girl, pretending, child-like wonder, and monstrous maternity. In hypertextual moments, these interconnections of maternity, monstrosity and technology both challenge and reinscribe traditional western tropes of maternal bodies. However, I argue that one particular reading (which I have identified in review and gallery responses) of Piccinini's work truncates the potentialities of multiple hypertextual readings at the site(sight) of monstrous cute appeal. The monstrous cute reading of Piccinini's artwork seduces the eye of the viewer yet tranquilizes the movements of the slippery mutants suggested by their monstrous forms and firm imbrication in contemporary narratives of science and technology. Instead of making the hyperlink of cute appeal one of many hypertextual links, the reception of Piccinini's creations as monstrous cute becomes the dominant reading of the artist's work. Mutant maternal bodies who slip through rigid boundaries and suggest different responses to contemporary debates about new technologies are then confined within circuits of cute-convention where potentially threatening corporealities are rendered domestic, sentimental and safe.

It is easy to enjoy being seduced by Piccinini's artworks that inhabit what is popularly thought of as the exciting new realm of cyber(cultural)space where the hype and hypertext of different technologies produce biologically-blended families bonded together by expressions of what the artist perceives as "unconditional love". The satisfaction of this seduction, however, is limited. In the end, Piccinini gives to her voracious audiences artworks that in hypertextual moments hold contradictory readings of contemporary technologies, biology and maternal bodies. While the hypertextual moment enables different readings to co-exist simultaneously, in

particular instances, such as readings of monstrous cute, one interpretation may be more compelling than others. In one installation opposing discourses of tradition or challenge interact or counteract one another with one predominating or both existing hypertextually. If we are so adulatory in our responses to Piccinini's work and focus on the subversive threads to the exclusion of the strands that reinstate convention then, in our selectiveness we run the risk of accepting and affirming old narratives that seek to contain, control and limit discourses of technoscience and technomaternity.

Chapter 6
Conclusion

My thesis has investigated representations of maternity in cyber(cultural)space which I have defined as the domain of fluidity, multiplicity and possibility as enabled by cyber technologies. Haunted unrelentingly by images of the Good Mother in a variety of texts I turned to the cyber-domain in the hope of finding images, stories and experiences of mothering that move beyond traditional tropes of motherhood. What I found throughout the rhizomatic pathways of cyber(cultural)space was the, perhaps inevitable, spectre of the Good Mother who ties maternal bodies to sentimentalized notions of motherhood and the natural. But, as well as these Good Mothers I also met a diverse crowd of unruly, Bad, Hip, Outlaw, monstrous, and techno-maternal bodies.

As a mother and postgraduate student immersed in the techno-culture of the first decade of the twenty-first century I looked to cyber(cultural)space for a range of elements to support and inspire my research, writing and mothering work. I googled and surfed for information about a range of topics relevant to maternal bodies. I sought support, with varying degrees of success, in a range of online communities. Having a strong sense of humour I eagerly searched for other maternal technobodies who enjoyed using humour to render ridiculous traditional tropes of maternity. And from these often hilarious depictions of mothering that raise laughter against conventional narratives of motherhood I looked for other forms of defiant maternity to inspire and sustain my own. Often associated with defiance of tradition, the monster was a figure that I also sought out. The interrogation of monstrous maternal bodies demonstrated numerous possibilities for moving beyond normative constructions of motherhood. And because I am a cyber-feminist mother of colour academic it was important to me to investigate the possibilities of constructing and deconstructing representations of political, raced, classed and creative cyber-maternities.

My original contribution to feminist examinations of maternity in this thesis has been to investigate representations of mothering in cyber(cultural)space focusing on those that go beyond normative discourses of motherhood. I drew upon the theories of Christine Hine and David Bell who describe the cyber-realm as hardware, stories,

experience and culture that shape and are shaped by contemporary cultures.[1] My extension of the cyber-realm to include CRD ROMs and art galleries displaying cyber artworks provided space to not only interrogate maternity websites but also to investigate the CD ROM *Patchwork Girl*, created by Shelley Jackson as well as the techno-maternal creatures of Patricia Piccinini.

Cybermamas on the Net

Since the birth of my first child in 1999 I have threaded my own paths through rhizomes of commercial, humorous and alternative maternal texts in cyber(cultural)space. I have often turned to the Internet, the domain most easily identified in the popular imagination with cyber(cultural)space, for information, entertainment, support and connection with others. After breaching the barrage of "informative" advertisements I found the commercial websites of the Buy-Right Mums to be a useful source of information about children's health and products associated with child care. *Bad Mothers Club* was, and still is, a place where I have enjoyed the darkly humorous writings of the very Bad Mothers and in particular Stephanie Calman who delights in poking fun at traditional constructions of motherhood. Hypertexting on from the Bad Mothers I have also felt some sense of community with the Hip Mamas who encourage a raced maternity of creativity and political activism.

While the common thread of mothering runs through the BR Mums, *BMC* and *Hip Mama* websites it is transformed into three different constructions of maternal bodies. All three sites focus on maternity, yet they each place a different emphasis on the ways in which maternal bodies are implicated in narratives of techno-medical interventions, commercialization, humour, and community. Using a light Disney-style of humour the BR Mums' websites link maternal bodies, goods and services in remediations of the shopping imaginaries of print maternity magazines. These flows of consumption and maternity immersed in biotouristic desire construct the BR Mum as a contemporary cyber-version of the Good Mother who fully embraces techno-medical interventions into reproductive processes. While the BR Mums are able to enjoy the vastness and ease of the shopping cyber-imaginary they "buy" – purchase and accept –

---

[1] Christine Hine, *Virtual Ethnography*, (London: Sage, 2000). See also David Bell, *An Introduction to Cybercultures*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 1-3.

the "right" culturally and commercially sanctioned products, services, ideas and information associated with childbearing and rearing in a wired version of the institution of motherhood. From their embracing of narratives of commercialism and tradition they also smilingly (re)produce Rheingoldian notions of idealized community.

In stark contrast to the BR Mums the Bad Mothers of the *BMC* revel in a black humour that marks them as unruly mothers who challenge mainstream media's preoccupation with images of perfect motherhood. The *BMC* forums, however, while open to others who share the often cutting sense of humour that pervades the site, express and uphold in many ways a specifically British white, heterosexual, middle-class maternity. An emphasis on humorous observations without further analysis restricts *BMC*'s ability to critically examine conventional maternity. This privileging of humour over sustained and in-depth humorous critique of traditional motherhood at times contains *BMC* within the lighthearted appeal of some mainstream maternity magazines – the very publications that *BMC* has vowed to challenge and repudiate.

Hip Mamas move even further into the territory of maternity that is alternative to the normative discourses promoted in the BR Mum websites and partially expressed in the *BMC*. *Hip Mama* acknowledges the need for financial support but refuses to bombard the viewer/user with advertisements and commercial products. The Hip Mamas use humour at times but they focus on writing a raced, political and artistic maternity that challenges traditional representations of maternal bodies as apolitical and creative only in the domestic sphere. Their writings construct an empowered feminist cybermaternal body, the Hip Mama, as well as an alternative online maternity community. Both these Hip entities are, however, divided along lines such as parenting philosophies, lifestyle, desire for idealized community and race. Divisions in the *Hip Mama* community are revealed in some of the bitter conflicts that have exploded in the posts over the years. These divisions and eruptions demonstrate the inevitably fragmented state of maternity, as opposed to normative constructions of motherhood as a universal state. However, despite the presence of a vocal group of participants vehemently upholding traditional notions of maternity, *Hip Mama* is still a vital cyber-threat to the dusty old narratives of conventional motherhood.

Although all three categories of maternity websites, commercial, humorous and alternative, are distinct they are also linked by the movements of the hypertext

reader/interactor, the cyber version of David Gauntlett's pick and mix reader.[2] Just as I have done during my investigations it is possible to click on the "expert"-derived information of the BR Mums, hypertext over to have a laugh with the Bad Mothers of *BMC* and then link on to the political action of the Hip Mamas. This rapid click-linking reveals a cybermaternity of diversity and hybridity. It also opens up the possibilitiy of cybermamas exploring and "trying on" different cybermaternal positions and identities. This kind of hypertexted play in the new cyber domain offers the potential to challenge the still-hovering ghost of the Good Mother.

Just as I have enjoyed investigating the maternity websites and meeting a variety of Bad Mothers in the first part of this thesis I have also derived considerable pleasure from interrogating Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl.* A slippery, brash and charming monster, Patchwork Girl, her equally monstrous textual mother, the character Mary Shelley, and Shelley Jackson herself take the already complex and fascinating Frankenstein myth and hypertext it into a feminist tale of queer maternity. As a hyperfiction, *Patchwork Girl* cunningly and compellingly interweaves threads of *Frankenstein*, technology, maternity, bodies, flesh, hypertext and authorship.

From my expansion of general notions of cyber(cultural)space to include CD ROMs, the further extension of conceptions of the cyber-domain to incorporate art galleries exhibiting cyber-art enables me to investigate the techno-maternal creatures of internationally renowned Australian artist, Patricia Piccinini. Her creatures are not only the imagined products of current bio-technologies, they are also monstrous maternal blendings of science, culture, race and class. My discussion of Piccinini's installations reveals images of boundary breaching cyborgean maternal bodies but this is just one reading of her objects. Further investigation reveals the closing down of a number of rhizomatic possibilities that flicker over and through the monstrous creatures. This shutting down of possibilities is apparent in four main areas: readings of monstrous cute, the public reception of the techno-creatures, academic and mainstream accounts of the installations and Piccinini's own stories concerning the work.

---

[2] David Gauntlett, *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction*, London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 196-198.

Monstrous

Apart from the rampantly subversive *Patchwork Girl* narratives of traditional motherhood haunt the cybermaternal texts I examine in this thesis. Yet throughout all of these cybertexts strands of the monstrous challenge notions of conventional mothering. In the BR Mum websites monstrosity is always threatened in the abject flesh of the pregnant woman that biotourism seeks to control. While the monster mother is a potential threat on the BR Mum websites she is celebrated by the Bad Mothers of the *BMC*. These Bad Mothers are rendered monstrous by their humour, unruliness and excess. The Bad Mother is the embodiment of the unruly woman who is "too fat, too mouthy, too old, too dirty, too pregnant, too sexual (or not sexual enough) for the norms of gender representation"[3] This unruliness ensures that the Bad Mothers, with a laugh and a wink, exceed the limits of traditional tropes of motherhood. Thus, the Bad Mothers are monstrous and monstrously funny maternal bodies.

While they are not monstrous maternal bodies the Hip Mamas are cyber Mother Outlaws – rebellious figures who transgress dominant discourses of motherhood. The Hip maternal cyber outlaws take and twist male-dominated fantasies of colonizing cyber(cultural)space by literally opening up (cyber)space for women to write their own stories of mothering. Hip Mamas use the cyber domain as a home base for their activist work and their construction of an empowered and feminist maternity that is situated in context.

While the cybermaternal bodies of the maternity websites trouble normative motherhood through monstrously unruly humour and the rebelliousness of Mother Outlaws, *Patchwork Girl*'s challenge to traditional maternity is delivered via circuits of monstrous queer maternal bodies. *Patchwork Girl's* re-animation of *Frankenstein*'s female monster celebrates the flesh and desire of monstrous mothers and their progeny. Even though the character Mary Shelley creates or births Patchwork Girl, she acknowledges and acts upon a maternal desire that is culturally taboo, going beyond motherly affection. Mary Shelley, however, becomes as monstrous as her creation as queer desire leads to swapping patches of their own skin and sewing them on to each other.

Just as Patchwork Girl is the "hideous progeny" of print media, fiction and literary theory she is also the monstrous offspring of hypertext technology.[4] Patchwork Girl is not only birthed by Mary Shelley she is also literally pieced together by the efforts of reader/interactors. The scars of the enfleshed Patchwork Girl and the hypertext links of the hyperfiction demonstrate the connectivities between maternity, monstrosity, queer desire, character, text, reader and author that exist in fragmentation.

The monstrous bodies of the character Mary Shelley and Patchwork Girl disrupt traditional notions of how maternal bodies are to be thought of and included in literary works. Their melding of maternal/authorial desires materializes space for collaborative authorship/creation and queers conventional depictions of maternity. The reader/interactor is also drawn into these streaming rhizomes of maternity/authoring and by direct interactive involvement with the cyber-text becomes yet another monstrous maternal creating body. *Patchwork Girl* is, then, a hyperfiction that celebrates and flaunts the collaborative creation of a monstrous maternity of queer desire and flesh that challenges traditional tropes of maternal bodies as well as conventional constructions of readers and authors.

While both *Patchwork Girl* – text and character - and Piccinini's creatures celebrate their monstrosity there are major differences in the way that the monstrous maternal works in these cybermateranal bodies. In contrast to *Patchwork Girl*'s subversive tale of monstrous queer maternity Piccinini's techno-maternal monsters, in a hypertextual moment, both challenge and reinforce dominant discourses of motherhood. Although the hypertextual moment allows a plethora of sometimes contradictory meanings to be held simultaneously in the case of some analyses of Piccinini's artwork one element dominates other threads. In readings of monstrous subversions Piccinini's creatures challenge conventional constructions of maternity as mothering "ordinary" and conventionally attractive children (*Still Life*) and also as white and beyond the teenage years (*Truck Babies*). The monstrous aspects of Piccinini's creatures also refuse oppositions of "natural" birth and maternity/reproductive technologies (*The Young Family*).

---

[3] Kathleen Rowe, 'Roseanne: Unruly Woman as Domestic Goddess', *Screen*, Vol 31, No. 4, 1990, pp. 410-414.

[4] Mary Shelley, Preface, *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus,* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

In other readings of Piccinini's artwork, however, the potential for subversion mobilized by the monstrous is shut-down by the close associations of monstrosity with teratological narratives of race, class and conventional maternity. Also the coming together of two elements of Piccinini's artwork, monstrosity and cuteness, acts to terminate the multiple possibilities of the hypertextual moment in readings of monstrous cute. These moments are evident in the abject appeal of *The Young Family*'s mother-creature, the adoring white little-girl maternity and adorably monstrous creatures of *Still Life* as well as the dazzling finish, boundary-breaching bodies and associations of conventional 1950s narratives of *Truck Babies*. Thus, Piccinini gives to her voracious audiences monstrous cyber-maternal bodies that both challenge and uphold traditional representations of motherhood. I argue that in monstrous cute readings of her work, Piccinini offers a sentimentalised conventional take on twenty-first century issues of technology and maternity that questions but is ultimately situated in dominant discourse.

Overall

The dynamic process of shaping and being shaped by culture enables cyber(cultural)space to frequently mutate and morph deconstructing and reconstructing text, image, ideas and experience. This constant movement of stories, experience and culture combined with the rhizomatic qualities of cyber(cultural)space encourages the potential for subversion. I do not claim that the cyber-realm is a utopian place where identity markers and bodies disappear and everybody is happy because everybody else knows their names. But my travels and research into cyber(cultural)space reveal the possibilities for overturning conventional narratives in general, and specifically those attached to techno-maternal bodies. Yes, the spectre of the Good Mother hypertexts through the BR Mum websites, *BMC*, *Hip Mama* and the artwork of Patricia Piccinini. Yet there are also a considerable number of wickedly funny Bad Mothers, loudly defiant outlaw Hip Mamas, unreservedly queerly monstrous maternal bodies in Patchwork Girl and boundary challenging technomaternal creatures in Piccinini's art. While the Good Mother is out there in cyber(cultural)space happily homesteading in the new electronic frontier there are enough Hip, Bad, outlaw, queer, monstrous maternal bodies in the cyber-domain ready to challenge her – delete buttons at dawn! And to give hope to all of us who search for those mad, baaaaaaaaaaaaaad, monstrous cyber-maternal bodies.

Processing

Deciding on my thesis topic was easy. I felt compelled to explore two areas of investigation that speak to me of potential, change and subverting dominant discourse – the possibilities that fuel my feminism. To me this potential for overcoming dominant discourse became evident in the areas of inquiry concerning maternity and cyber(cultural)space. Yet, the process of researching and writing the thesis has been difficult, time and energy-intensive yet inspiring and exciting. There have been logistical and structural problems to overcome that impacted upon the amount - and sometimes the quality - of time available for thesis work. These issues include negotiating bringing in a baby to work and baby change facilities; difficulties in accessing quality child care; having to do paid work to pay for child care; family responsibilities; and, pressure and unrealistic deadlines from an inflexible administration system that described my periods of maternity and sick leave as "excuses" for not undertaking a "timely completion".

Reflecting on the actual process of researching, thinking and writing the thesis I am struck by just how closely connected the academic and the maternal have been and still are in my life. As previously mentioned when my children were babies I often breastfed while engaging with the websites I investigated. And in that milky world of breastfeeding my thoughts usually swirled and re-organised themselves around new or different concepts or expressions. During the acts of breastfeeding and thinking about mothering and cyber-technology words, ideas and experiences about cybermaternity tripped from my cyber-maternal body to the pulsating page. Like cyber(cultural)space my maternity is constantly being shaped by and shaping stories, images and experiences from conventional and subversive maternal cultures. My wonderings, writings and experiences concerning this intertwining of maternal body and cyber-technologies have sparked thoughts about a cyber version of Cixous' writing in white ink and what that might entail. Perhaps this is a tantalizing glimpse of future investigations.

Now that my children have left the baby stage behind – they are now 10, 8 and 5 years old - and we can have conversations where we discuss different aspects of various issues they often ask me about my work. The tensions between my attempts at feminist mothering and our current living situation in a very traditional white Christian rural area have resulted in numerous lively discussions about a range of topics – issues

of gender, race, belief systems, abortion, sexuality, peace and war. To them talking about feminist cyber-maternity is important because it is my "work" and intriguing as it stands in contrast to the standpoints of their friends' mothers. Living in this community has made my children and myself hyper-aware of the presence of the Good Mother in RL as well as in print and cyber-texts.

Together my children and I have looked at parts of all of the maternity texts I examined in this thesis. Overall they responded with delight and enjoyment to the cute monstrosity of Piccinini's creatures, the monstrous hypterexted body of Patchwork Girl and the funny stories of the Bad Mothers. What appealed to them most was the transgression enacted by these representations of restrictive forms of mothering, children's behaviour and family. My children clearly stated that at times they would like a costume-sewing, baking, beaming Good Mother because she would "be good for school parties, Bookweek, [and] dance concerts". But they also took great delight in remembering and retelling stories of my own "Bad Mother" moments – stapling ribbons on ballet shoes, supergluing costumes and buying instead of baking for school parties to mention just a few incidents. There was a feeling amongst the children that I had "gotten away with" as they said "doing things your [my] own way".

Difference as depicted in the figure of the monstrous maternal body and in the *Hip Mama* discussions of race also drew strong responses from my children. The idea of hypertextually (re)creating the monstrous body of Patchwork Girl greatly appealed to their techno-charged sensibilities and inspired them to construct many of their own stories of monster-mothers and their equally monstrous progeny. In these stories the children live out their differences from mainstream society. Discussions of the conflict concerning race in the Hip Mama forums also enabled us to talk about the ways in which our stories of ancestors, beliefs and culture differ from those of the Anglo-Australians living near us.

In my thesis the stories I investigate of intransigent maternity reveal strong and subtle meshings of academic investigation and mothering as well as "work" and "personal life". The narratives also demonstrate the constructedness of the binaries of public/private, work/family and maternity/cyber-technology. Considering the prevalence of these binaries as well as representations of the Good Mother in contemporary cyber-texts I argue that there is much work to be done in further

feminist explorations of these concerns in the exciting new field of cybermaternal investigation.

The End

I thoroughly enjoy the hypertexted medium of cyber(cultural)space because its workings not only operate in a similar way to the functioning of my brain – by linking some rather disparate items – but it also serves as a metaphor for how I experience mothering. That is, the cyber-realm of flickering signifiers enacts my experience of a fragmented maternity. This notion of cyber-maternity takes Adrienne Rich's division of motherhood into institution and experience and splits it further into a continually hypertexted series of images and text that tell of binding and disassociation, pleasure and guilt, love and resentment, abjection and celebration. Along with Rich my sense of contemporary mothering finds expression through the complexity and contradictions of more than one way of knowing and being a mother. I argue that maternity in the twenty-first century can still be understood through Rich's categories of institution and experience. But this binary model of theorising mothering does not entirely capture twenty-first century maternity as contemporary maternal bodies range through hypertextual moments of increasingly regulated information, biological change, emotions, leaky erupting bodies and strategic necessities. Neither do representations of maternal bodies in cyber(cultural)space – even though it is the domain of mobility and fluidity - always keep pace with these complex contradictions of mothering.

It would be easy to dismiss the commodity cluttered maternity of the BR Mums as merely commercialized conventional motherhood. While this critique is certainly valid it also does not account for the useful information and the pleasure gained in the shopping cyber-imaginary that these sites provide. In a similar vein, *BMC* offers some extremely witty and insightful critiques of traditional narratives of motherhood. Yet, the unruly *BMC* is still haunted by aspirational desires and assumptions of British white middle-class culture that renders invisible all those outside this sphere. Likewise, the Hip Mamas' often fiery writings back to conventional motherhood are also troubled by some of their contributors clinging to normative notions of motherhood in their attempts to reassert a white middle-class maternity that is confined to the body and roped to the natural. Similarly, in the artwork of Patricia

Piccinini the potential of her slippery mutants to raise questions about current interminglings of technology and maternity is stopped in monstrous cute readings of her creatures. I am proud to say, however, that the monstrous maternal of Patchwork Girl remains at liberty. Passionately constructing mothering moments of queer desire, Patchwork Girl continues to run amok through the hypertext passages of poetic prose, bodies, words, links and monstrous longings.

While the Good Mother is a persistent ghost that continues to wander through the spaces and networks of meanings created by *BMC*, *Hip Mama*, *Patchwork Girl* and Patricia Piccinini she is also confronted by a rowdy crew of monstrous Cyber-Mamas that go beyond conventional representations of motherhood. The diverse examples of monstrous cyber-maternal bodies investigated in this thesis stand laughing at the Good Mother's construction of motherhood that is so narrow it cannot possibly fit within its boundaries the richness and diversity of the Bad, Hip, outlaw, monstrous techno-charged mothers. And it is within the rhizomatic and hypertexted cybercultures of these subversive maternal bodies that possibilities arise for writing fragmented, connected, raced, classed, creative, political, contextualised and queer cyber-maternities fitting for the twenty-first century. May all the cyber-mamas of the cyber-world stay wired and go forth to live their dangerous, monstrous and unruly lives in rebelliousness and subversion!

Selected Bibliography

Aarseth, Espen J. *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature.* Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997.

Absolutely Fabulous. Television series. Producer: BBC TV, United Kingdom, 1992-1996 and 2001-2005.

Advertisement for Bee Lavender, *Mamaphonic: Balancing Motherhood and Other Creative Acts*, Amazon.com, available at http://www.amazon.com/Mamaphonic-Balancing-Motherhood-Other-Creative/dp/1932360646/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1246252446&sr=1-3, date accessed 18/5/09.

"Advertising, Baby Marketing." *Mother and Baby Magazine*, available at http://www.baby-marketing.co.uk/magazines/pages/mother_and_baby_magazine.htm, date accessed 30/10/07.

Aitken, Gill, Pam Alldred, Robin Allwood, Tom Billington, Erica Burman, Brenda Goldberg, eds. *Psychology Discourse Practice: From Regulation to Resistance.* London: Taylor and Francis, Ltd, 1996.

Aizley, Harlyn. "Are You My Mothers?" *Parents.com*, available at http://community.parents.com/dgroups/persona.jsp?plckPersonalPage=PersonaBlog&plckUserId=b299f3b565ea91323795bdaf06d989ab&userId=b299f3b565e, date accessed 09/09/07.

Alien, Britannia Film Archives, available at http://www.britannia.org/film/filmdetails.php?FilmID=00000149, date accessed 2/4/08.

Americanbaby.com, available at http://www.americanbaby.com/

America's MediaMarketing, Inc, available at http://www.americasmedia.com/AC_CurrentMagazineList.htm, date accessed 31/10/07.

Amerika, Mark."Stitch Bitch: The Hypertext Author as Cyborg-Femme Narrator." *Amerika On-Line* #7, 15/03/98, available at http://www.heise.de/tp/english/inhalt/kolu/3193/1.html

Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Apple, Rima D. "Constructing Motherhood: Scientific Motherhood in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries." *Social History of Medicine* 8, 2 (1995): 161-178.

Arendell, Terry. "Conceiving and Investigating Motherhood: The Decade's Scholarship." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62 November (2000), 1192-1207.

"Ariel Gore Lit Star." *Red Room Writer Profile*, available at http://www.redroom.com/author/ariel-gore/bio, date accessed 27/5/09.

Association for Research On Mothering, available at http://www.yorku.ca/arm/aboutarm.html.

Atwood, Margaret. *Oryx and Crake.* N.S.W: Doubleday Books, 2003.

"Aussies not ready for public breastfeeding: poll." *Heraldsun.com.au*, August 31st, 2009, available at http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,26005609-5005961,00.html, date accessed 1/9/08.

Australia's Funniest Home Videos. Channel 9, 2008.

Aycock, Alan and Norman Buchignani. "The email murders: reflections on 'dead' letters." In *Cybersociety: Computer-Mediated Communication and Community,* edited by Stephen G. Jones. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995, 184-231.

BabyCenter, available at http://www.babycenter.com/

Bad Mothers Club, Incorporating Bad Dads, available at http://www.badmothersclub.co.uk/jsp/index.jsp.

"Bad Mothers Club." *StumbleUpon, Discover New Web Sites*, available at http://www.stumbleupon.com/search?q=Bad+Mothers+Club, date accessed 4/4/08.

Baird, Barbara. "Children, kids, kiddies: The short road to 'infantile citizenship'" Conference paper delivered at the Cultural Studies Association of Australasia Conference, Melbourne, 2002.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*, Translated by Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984.

Balaskas, Janet. *Active Birth: A Concise Guide to Natural Childbirth.* London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1989.

Ballaster, Ros. *Women's Worlds: Ideology, Femininity and the Woman's Magazines.* Hampshire: MacMillan Education, 1991.

Balsamo, Anne. "Public Pregnancies and Cultural Narratives of Surveillance." In *Revisioning Women, Health, and Healing: Feminist, Cultural, and Technoscience Perspectives*, edited by Adele Clarke and Virginia L. Olesen. (New York: Routledge, 1996), 231-253.

Barclay, Alison. "Send in the Clones." Arts and Entertainment. *Herald Sun*, Tuesday, December 17th 2002, p. 51.

Barker, Robin. *Baby and Toddler Meals*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 2004.

Barker, Robin. *Baby Love: Everything You Need to Know About Your Babies First Year*, Chippendale, NSW: Pan Macmillan, 1994.

Barker, Robin. *Crying.* Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 1998.

Barker, Robin. *Feeding*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 1998.

Barker, Robin. *Sleeping*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 1998.

Barker, Robin. *The Mighty Toddler; The Essential Guide to the Toddler Years*. Sydney: Macmillan, 2001.

Barreca, Regina, ed. *Last Laughs: Perspectives on Women and Comedy, Studies in Gender and Culture*, Volume 2. New York: Gordon and Breach, 1988.

Barrett, Virginia, Julianne Pierce, Francesca de Rimini, Josephine Starrs. "Brave New Girls." *VNS Matrix*, available at http://lx.sysx.org/vnsmatrix.html, date accessed 5/7/08.

Barrett, Virginia, Julianne Pierce, Francesca de Rimini, Josephine Starrs. "Remapping Cyberspace with a Feminist Bent." *Women Writing: Views and Prospects 1975-1995* series, National Library of Australia, available at http://www.nla.gov.au/events/barrett.html, date accessed 3/8/09.

Barthes, Roland. *Image, Music, Text*, translated by Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.

Barthes, Roland. *S/Z*, Translated by Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1976.

Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." *Image, Music, Text*, Trans. Stephen Heath, London: Fontana, 1977.

Bartlett, Alison. "Black Breasts, White Milk? Ways of Constructing Breastfeeding and Race in Australia." *Australian Feminist Studies* 19, 45 November (2004): 341-355.

Bartlett, Alison. *Breastwork: Rethinking Breastfeeding*, (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2005).

Bartlett, Alison. 'Scandalous practices and political performances: breastfeeding in the city'. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 16, 1 (2002): 111-121.

Bartlett, Alison. "Thinking Through Breasts." In *Fresh Milk: the Secret Life of Breasts*, edited by Fiona Giles. Crow's Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2003.

Bartlett, Alison and Fiona Giles, eds. "Meanings of Breastmilk: New Feminist Flavours." *Australian Feminist Studies*, 19, 45, November (2004): 269-402.

Bassett, Caroline. "Virtually Gendered: Life in an On-line World." In *The Subcultures Reader*, edited by Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton. London: Routledge, 1997, 537-550.

Battaglia, Debbora. "On Practical Nostalgia: Self-Prospecting among Urban Trobrianders." In *Rhetorics of Self-Making*, edited by Debbora Battaglia,. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, 77–96.

Baum, Frank L. *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985.

Bauman, Richard. "Contextualization, Tradition, and the Dialogue of Genres: Icelandic Legends and the Kraftaskald." In *Rethinking Context: Language as Interactive Phenomenon*, edited by Alessandro Duranti and Charles Goodwin, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 125-45.

Baym, Nancy K. "The Emergence of an Online Community." In *Cybersociety 2.0: Revisiting Computer-mediated Communication and Community*, edited by Steve Jones. London: Sage, 1998, 35-68.

Beaulieu, Anne. "The Brain at the End of the Rainbow: the Promises of Brain Scans in the Research Field and in the Media." In *Wild Science: Reading Feminism, Medicine and the Media*, edited by Janine Marchessault and K. Sawchuk. London: Routledge, 2000, 39-52.

Behlmer, George, Fred Leventhal, and F. M. Leventhal, eds. *Singular Continuities: Tradition, Nostalgia, and Identity in Modern British Culture*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000.

Bell, David. *An Introduction to Cybercultures*. London and New York: Routledge, 2001.

Bell, David. *Cyberculture Theorists: Manuel Castells and Donna Haraway*, (London: Routledge, 2007.

Bell, David and Barbara M. Kennedy. *The Cybercultures Reader*. London: Routledge, 2000.

Bell, David and Gil Valentine. *Consuming Geographies: We are Where we Eat*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Ben-Amos, Dan. "The Seven Strands of Tradition: Varieties in Its Meaning in American Folklore Studies." *Journal of Folklore Research* 21 2-3 (1984): 97-132.

Beninger, James R. "Personalization of mass media and the growth of pseudo-community." *Communication Research* 13, 3 (1987): 352-371.

Bernstein, Mark, Jay David Bolter, Michael Joyce, John B Smith. *Getting Started with Storyspace*. Eastgate Systems, Inc, available at http://www.eastgate.com/storyspace/DownloadWin.html, date accessed 9/8/08.

Biddulph, Steve. *Raising Babies: Should Under 3s Go To Nursery?* London: HarperThorsons, 2006.

Biennale of Electronic Arts, Perth, 2007, available at http://www.beap.org/, date accessed 2/6/08.

"Big Mother." Elizabeth A. Sackler, Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum website, 2005, available at https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist_art_base/gallery/piccinini.php?i=1002, date accessed 3/5/08.

Bilger, Audrey. *Laughing Feminism: Subversive Comedy in Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1998.

"Biography." *Heterosis Catalogue*, Drome, 2002, available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/essay.php?id=2, date accessed 20/1/03.

Bizy Moms, available at www.stayhomemom.biz and www.bizymoms.com-at-home.

Blank, Robert R and Janna C. Merrick eds. *The Politics of Pregnancy: Policy Dilemmas in the Maternal-Fetal Relationship*. New York: The Haworth Press, Inc, 1993.

"Blogs versus Subscription Websites." *SubHub:Publish for Profit*, September 14, 2006, available at http://www.subhub.com/articles/20060914, date accessed 10/11/08.

Blunt, Alison. "Collective Memory and Productive Nostalgia: Anglo-Indian Homemaking at McCluskieganj." *Environment and Planning* 21 (2003): 717–38.

Board of Studies, N.S.W., English Stage 6, Prescriptions: Area of Study, Electives and Texts, Higher School Certificate 2001-2003, p. 33, available at http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_hsc/pdf_doc/english_prestexts.pdf

Bolter, Jay David. *Writing Space Computers, Hypertext and the Remediation of Print*, 2nd Ed., Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Eribaum Associates, Inc., 2001.

Bolter, Jay David and Richard Gruisin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media.* London, England, Cambridge, Massachussetts: MIT Press, 2000.

Bondi, Liz. 'Locating Identity Politics' in *Place and the Politics of Identity* edited by Michael Keith and Steve Pile. (London: Routledge, 1993), 84-101.

Boraski, Chris. "History of Hypertext and the Web", available at http://www.boraski.com/www/hypertext.html, date accessed 2/5/07.

Bordo, Susan. "Are Mothers Persons: Reproductive Rights and the Politics of Subjectivity?" In *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*, by Susan Bordo. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, 71-98.

Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body.* Berkeley: CA: University of California Press, 1993.

Bowlby, John. *Child Care and the Growth of Love.* Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965.

Boyd, Chris. "Visions of a Strange New World" *The Australian Financial Review*, January 4, 2003, p. 68.

Braidotti, Rosi. "Cyberfeminism with a Difference", available at http://www.let.uu.nl/womens_studies/rosi/cyberfem.htm#par5, date accessed 20/12/05.

Braidotti, Rosi. "Cyberteratologies: Female Monsters Negotiate the Other's Participation in Humanity's Far Future." In *Envisioning the Future: Science Fiction and the Next Millenium,* edited by Marleen S. Barr, Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2003, 146-172.

Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Braidotti, Rosi. "Signs of Wonder and Traces of Doubt: on Teratology and Embodied Difference." In *Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs: Feminist Confrontations with Science, Medicine and Cyberspace*, edited by Nina Lykke and Rosi Braidotti. London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1996, pp. 135-152.

Bromberg, Heather. "Are MUDs communities? Identity, Belonging and Consciousness in Virtual Worlds." In *Cultures of Internet: Virtual Spaces, Real Histories, Living Bodies*, edited by Rob Shields. London: Sage, 1996, 143-52.

Brook, Barbara. *Feminist Perspectives on the Body.* London: Longman, 1999.

Brooker, Will. "Readings of Racism: Interpretation, Stereotyping and The Phantom Menace." *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 15, 1 (2001): 15-32.

Brown, Michael. "An Interview with Ariel Gore and Bee Lavender of Hip Mama." *Serials Review* 28, 2 Summer (2002): 159-162.

Bruns, Axel and Donna Lee Brien. "Teaching Electronic Writing: A Report from the Creative Industries Frontline." *Creative Industries Faculty*, Queensland University of Technology, available at http://snurb.info/files/31-03-03%20Teaching%20Electronic%20Creative%20Writing.doc

Brunsdon, Charlotte. *Screen Tastes: Soap Opera to Satellite Dishes* London: Routledge, [1991] 1997.

Buchanan, Andrea J. *Mother Shock: Loving Every (Other) Minute of It.* Seattle, WA: Seal Press, 2003.

Buchanan, Andrea J. *The Dark Side,* available at *PhillyMama.com.*

Burston Paul and Colin Richardson, eds. *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, Gay Men and Popular Culture.* London, New York: Routledge, 1995.

Bust Magazine available at http://www.bust.com/, date accessed 6/9/09.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* New York: Routledge, 1990.

Buttrose, Ita, and Penny Adams. *Mother Guilt: Australian Women Reveal Their True Feelings About Motherhood.* Camberwell, Vic: Viking: 2005.

"Café Backs Breast Feeding." City of Joondalup Council website, 15 August 2009, available at http://www.inmycommunity.com.au/news-and-views/local-news/Cafe-backs-breast-feeding/7532915/, date accessed 20/8/09.

Cashman, Ray. "Critical Nostalgia and Material Culture in Northern Ireland." *Journal of American Folklore* 119, 472 (2006): 137-160.

Chambers 20th Century Dictionary. New Edition, edited by Elizabeth McLaren Kirkpatrick. (Edinburgh: W & R Chambers Ltd, 1983.

Cherney, Lynn and Elizabeth Reba Weiss, eds. *Wired Women: Gender and New Realities in Cyberspace.* Seattle: Seal Press, 1996.

Chodorow, Nancy B. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.

Cixous, Helene. *Coming to Writing and Other Essays.* With an introductory essay by Susan Rubin Suleiman. Edited and translated by Deborah Jenson. Translated by Sarah Cornell, Ann Liddle and Susan Sellers. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991.

Cixous, Helene. "Laugh of the Medusa", translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. *Signs* 1, 4 (1976): 875-93.

Clara's Heart. Director Robert Mulligan. With Whoopi Goldberg, Michael Ontkean, Kathleen Quinlan. MTM Enterprises, 1988.

Clarke, Roger. "Information Technology: Weapon of Authoritarianism or Tool of Democracy?" The Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology, Australian National University, available at http://www.anu.edu.au/people/Roger.Clarke/DV/PaperAuthism.html, date accessed: 1 August, 2007.

Clarke, Victoria. "Feminist perspectives on lesbian parenting: A review of the literature 1972-2002." *The Psychology of Women Section Review* 7, 2 Autumn (2005): 11-23.

Clarke, Victoria. "From outsiders to motherhood to reinventing the family: Constructions of lesbian parenting in the psychological literature – 1886-2006." *Women's Studies International Forum* 31, 2 March- April (2008): 118-128.

Cleland, Kathy. "The E-volution of new media art." *Artlink* 21, 3 (2001): 12-13.

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)." In *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 1996, 3-25.

Comer, Lee. *The Myth of Motherhood.* Nottingham: The Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, Spokesman Pamphlett, 1971.

"Confusion about breastfeeding ban." *Sunshine Coast Daily Online*, 14 November 2008, available at http://www.thedaily.com.au/news/2008/nov/14/confusion-about-breastfeeding-ban/, date accessed 20/8/09.

Conjunctions, available at www.conjunctions.com

Cookes, Thom. "Multimedia Spawns Art." *The Age*, Wednesday 12 July, 1995, p. 21.

Copeland, Julie. "Patricia Piccinini – Fleshy Creatures." *ABC Arts Online* available at http://www.abc.net.au/arts/visual/stories/s597714.htm, 2002, date accessed 5/7/2003.

Cosslett, Tess. *Women Writing Childbirth: Modern Discourses of Motherhood.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994.

Cousin, Geraldine. *Women in Dramatic Place and Time: Contemporary Female Characters on Stage.* London: Routledge, 1996.

Cox, Amanda. *Real Mums*, available at realmums.com.au.

Cox, Sue. *Breastfeeding I Can Do That.* Lindisfarne, Tasmania: TasLaC, 1997.

Cox, Sue. *Breastfeeding with Confidence – A Do-It-Yourself Guide.* Sydney: Finch, 2004.

Cox, Sue. Mother and Baby ... Getting it Right', Producer: Peter McKinley and Associates, Hobart, Tasmania, Australian Breastfeeding Association,Tasmania Branch, video, 2002.

Crawford, Mary. "Gender and Humour in Social Context." *Journal of Pragmatics, The Pragmatics of Humour* 35, 9 September (2003): 1413-1430.

Creed, Barbara. *Media Matrix: Sexing the New Reality.* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2003.

Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis.* New York: Routledge, 1993.

Creed, Barbara. "Queering the Media: A Gay Gaze." In *Media Matrix: Sexing the New Reality* by Barbara Creed. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2003, 136-158.

Crittenden, Danielle. *Amanda Bright @ Home.* Waterville, Me: Thorndike Press, 2003.

Critz, Paul "'Addicted to Noise.' Crackles across the Web." *Tucson Weekly*, available at http://www.tucsonweekly.com/tw/06-06-96/mus.htm, date accessed 2/5/08.

Cross, Rosie and Linda Pears. *Geekgirl* , available at http://www.geekgirl.com.au/blog/

Crowd, available at http://www.crowdmagazine.com/

Culler, Jonathan. *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981.

Davis, Fred. *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*. New York: New York Free Press, 1979.

de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*, Translated and edited by H.M Parshley. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1953.

Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

Dement, Linda. *Cyberflesh. Girlmonster*. CD ROM. Australian Network for Art and Technology. Australian Film Commission. Novamedia, 1995.

Dement, Linda. Projects available at http://www.lindadement.com/, date accessed 6/5/05.

Derrida, Jacques. *Dissemination*, translated by Barbara Johnson. Chicago: University Press, 1981.

Desperate Housewives. Television series. Producer: ABC Studios and Cherry Productions, United States of America, 2004-present.

de Saussaure, Ferdinand. *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris. Peru, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, [1972], 2000.

Dibbell, Julian. "A Rape in Cyberspace." *The Village Voice*, 21 December 1993, 36-42. Also available online. *Artlink*, available http://www.artlink.com.au/articles.cfm?id=2545 date accessed 27/08/07.

Dibbell, Julian. *My Tiny Life: Crime and Passion in a Virtual World*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999.

Dinnerstein, Dorothy. *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise*. New York: Harper and Row, 1977.

Di Quinzio, Patrice. *The Impossibility of Motherhood*. New York, London: Routledge, 1999.

Doll, Megan J. "Of Mutants and Malaise: The Artistic Experiments of Patricia Piccinini." *NY Arts Magazine*, available at http://nyartsmagazine.com/bbs4/messages/508.html, 2003, date accessed 2/10/03.

Douglas, Susan and Meredith Michaels. *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How it Has Undermined Women*. New York: Free Press, 2004.

Drabble, Margaret. *Jerusalem the Golden*. New York: Morrow, 1967.

Driving Miss Daisy. Director Bruce Beresford. With Morgan Freeman and Jessica Tandy. Majestic Films International, 1989.

Duden, Barbara. *Disembodying Women: Perspectives on Pregnancy and the Unborn*, Translated by Lee Hoinacki. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Ehm, Erica, *The Yummy Mummy Club*, available at http://www.yummymummysite.com/index.cfm?PID=15491&PIDLIST=15491, date accessed 14/12/06.

Ehrenberg, Jennifer. "Beyond Cute: Hallmark Greeting Cards." *Print* 50 July/Aug (1996): 52-61.

Elder, Catriona. *Being Australian: Narratives of National Identity.* Crows Nest, N.S.W: Allen and Unwin, 2008.

Ellison, Sheila. *How Does She Do It? 101 Life Lessons from One Mother to Another.* New York: HarperOne, 2004.

Ellonen, Hanna Kaisa, Miia Kosonen, Kaisa Henttonen. "The Development of a Sense of Virtual Community." *International Journal of Web Based Communities* 3, 1 (2007): 114-130.

Engberg, Juliana. Curator and Reviewer. *Retrospectology: the World According to Patricia Piccinini, Australian Centre For Contemporary Art*, 2002, Catalogue.

Engberg, Juliana. "Truck Babies." *Retrospectology: the World According to Patricia Piccinini Exhibition Catalogue*, p.24.

Esterberg, Kristin G. 'P;anned Parenthood: The Construction of Motherhood in Lesbian Mother Advice Books' in *Feminist Mothering* edited by Andrea O'Reilly. Albany: State University of New York, 2008, 75-88.

Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England.* St. Albans, Hertz: Panther, [1844] 1958.

Evans, Mary, ed. *Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies.* London and New York: Routledge, 2001.

Fahy, Kathleen and Gabrielle Williams. 'Whose Interests are Served by the Portrayal of Childbearing Women in Popular Magazines for Women?" *Women and Birth* 17, 1 March (2004): 11-16.

Fawlty Towers. Fawltysite.Net, available at http://www.fawltysite.net/, date accessed 2/7/08

Featherstone, Mike. "The Body in Consumer Culture." In *The Body, Social Process and Cultural Theory*, edited by Mike Featherstone, Mike Hepworth and Brian S. Turner. London: Sage Publications, 1993, 171-196.

Fence, available at http://www.fencemag.com/v9nl/

Ferreira, Mary Aline Salgueiro Seabra. "Shelley Jackson's Patchwork Girl and Angela Carter's The Passion of New Eve: A Comparative Reading." *Patchwork Girl Comments, Etc,* Brown University Web pages investigating Patchwork Girl, available at http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/cpace/ht/pg/ferreira.html, date accessed, 2/1/05.

Fielding, Helen. *Bridget Jones's Diary.* London: Penguin 1999.

Figallo, Cliff. *Hosting Web Communities: Building Relationships, Increasing Customer Loyalty, and Maintaining a Competitive Edge.* New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1998.

Financial Review, afr.com, available at http://www.afr.com/home/, date accessed 6/2/09.

Firestone, Shulamith. *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution.* New York: Bantam Books, 1970.

Flax, Jane. "The Conflict Between Nurturance and Autonomy in Mother-Daughter Relationships and Within Feminism." *Feminist Studies* 4, 2 June (1978): 171-189.

Flew, Terry. *New Media: An Introduction.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Forrest Gump. Director: Robert Zemeckis. With Tom Hanks, Sally Field. USA, Paramount Pictures, 1994.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1.* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981.

Francis-Connolly, Elizabeth. "Constructing Parenthood: Portrayals of Motherhood and Fatherhood in Popular American Magazines." *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* 5, 1 (2003): 179-185.

Franklin, Sarah. "Drawing the Line at Not-Fully-Human: What We Already Know." *The American Journal of Bioethics* 3, 3 (2003): 25-27.

Franklin, Sarah. Robbie Davis Floyd. "Reproductive Technologies." *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women*, New York: Routledge, 2001, available at http://www.davis-floyd.com/USERIMAGES/File/Reproductive%20Technologies.pdf, date accessed 2/3/08.

Franzway, Suzanne. *Sexual Politics and Greedy Institutions: Union Women, Commitments and Conflicts in Public and Private.* Sydney: Pluto Press, 2001.

Franzway, Suzanne. "Work and family life: what we've forgotten." *Australian Review of Public Affairs*, 4 April 2005, available at http://www.australianreview.net/digest/2005/04/franzway.html, date accessed 3/12/06.

Freedman, Mia. *Mama Mia: A Memoir of Mistakes, Magazines and Motherhood.* Pymble, NSW: 2009.

Freedman, Mia. *Mamamia* available at http://www.mamamia.com.au/

Friday, Nancy. *My Mother/My Self.* New York: Delacorte Press, 1977.

Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique.* Great Britain: Penguin Books, [1963] 1965.

Friedan, Betty. "Betty Friedan explains why the feminist movement is imperative not only for women but for men as well." In *Extraordinary Speeches of the American Century: In Our Own Words*, edited by Robert Torricelli and Andrew Carroll. New York: Washington Square Press, 2000, pp. 288-289.

Gadd, Michael. "Female Comedians Still Face Problems of the Past." *The Age, theage.com*, April 6, 2007, available at http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2007/04/06/1175366468720.html, date accessed 9/9/08.

Gajjala, Radhika. *Cyber Selves: Feminist Ethnographies of South Asian Women*, Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2004.

Gaskin, Ina May. *Spiritual Midwifery.* Summertown: Book Publishing Company, 3rd Edition, 1990.

Gauntlett, David. *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction.* London and New York: Routledge, 2002.

Gauntlett, David. ed. *Web.Studies: Rewiring Media Studies for the Digital Age.* London: Arnold, 2000.

Genocchio, Benjamin. "Genetically Modified Sculpture." *Weekend Australian,* Jan 11-12, 2003, Arts, R21.

Genosko, Gary. "Cute Art." *Border Crossings* 18 4 Nov (1999): 12-14.

Ghost. Director Jerry Zucker. With Patrick Swayze, Demi Moore, Whoopi Goldberg. Paramount Pictures, 1990.

Gibbs, Nancy. "Stem Cells: The Hope and the Hype." *Time Magazine,* available at http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1220538,00.html, posted Sunday July 30th, 2006.

Gibson, Joel. "The art of Cloning." *State of the Arts, 2003,* available at http://www.stateart.com.au/sota/visual/default.asp?fid=1688, date accessed 16/5/2004.

Gibson, William. *Neuromancer.* New York: Ace Books, 1984.

Giddens, Anthony. *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics.* Cambridge, Polity Press 1994.

Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.

Gilbert, Joanne R. *Performing Marginality: Humour, Gender and Cultural Critique.* Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2004.

Gilbert, Lucia Albino."Current Perspectives on Dual-Career Families." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 3 (1994): 101-105.

Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic – The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.

Giles, Fiona. *Fresh Milk The Secret Life of Breasts.* Crow's Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2003.

Glassie, Henry. "Tradition." In *Eight Words for the Study of Expressive Culture,* edited by Burt Feintuck, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003, 176-197.

Goddard, Donald. "Jeff Koons: What Art is to Begin With." *Art Review, New York Art World,* 2003, available at http://www.newyorkartworld.com/reviews/koons.html, date accessed 7/7/2005.

Goldberg, David. *Comments on Patchwork Girl Etc.* Brown University Web pages, English 112, 1996, available at http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/cpace/ht/pg/dpatch.html, date accessed 3/4/05.

Gonzalez, Jennifer. "The appended subject: race and identity as digital assemblage." In *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader,* edited by Amelia Jones. London and New York: Routledge, 2003, 534-45.

Goodeve, Thyrza Nichols. "Euphoric Enthusiasm: Jeff Koons's Celebration." *Parkett,* 50, 51 (1997): 88.

Gordon, Linda. *Woman's Body, Woman's Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America.* New York: Grossman/Viking, 1978.

Gore, Ariel and Bee Lavender, eds. *Breeder: Real-Life Stories from the New Generation of Mothers.* Seattle, WA: Seal Press, 2001.

Gore, Ariel. *The Essential Hip Mama: Writing from the Cutting Edge of Parenting. Live Girls.* Seattle, WA: Seal Press, 2004.

Gore, Ariel. *The Hip Mama Survival Guide: Advice from the Trenches on Pregnancy, Childbirth, Cool Names, Clueless Doctors, Potty Training and Toddler Avengers.* New York: Hyperion Books, 1998.

Gore, Ariel. *The Mother Trip: Hip Mama's Guide to Staying Sane in the Chaos of Motherhood.* Seattle, WA: Seal Press, 2000.

Goriss-Hunter, Anitra. 'Slippery Mutants Perform and Wink At Maternal Insurrections: Patricia Piccinini's Monstrous Cute'. *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 18, 4 (2004): 541-553.

Gough-Yates, Anna. *Understanding Women's Magazines: Publishing, Markets and Readerships.* New York: Routledge, 2003.

Grand Canyon. Director Lawrence Kasdan. With Danny Glover, Kevin Kline, Steve Martin, Mary McDonnell. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, 1991.

Grand Street, available at www.grandstreet.com/

Green, Jane. *Babyville.* New York: Broadway Books, 2002.

Grimshaw, Patricia, John Murphy and Belinda Probert. *Double Shift: Working Mothers and Social Change in Australia.* Beaconsfield: Circa, 2005.

Guyer, Carolyn. *Fretwork Notes*, available at http://www.mothermillennia.org/Carolyn/Fretwork_Notes.html, date accessed 3/5/07.

Guyer, Carolyn, editor, coordinator. *Mother Millennia*, available at http://www.mothermillennia.org/

Guyer, Carolyn, *Sister Stories*, available at http://www.nyupress.org/sisterstories/, date accessed 6/7/07.

Guyer, Carolyn, "Something About Quibbling." *Leonardo*, October 1992, p. 258.

Guyer, Carolyn, *Quibbling.* Eastgate Systems, Inc., USA, 1992.

Gymboree Play and Music, available at http://www.gymboree.com.au/index.html, date accessed 29/5/09.

Haig, Ian. "Interactive Refrigerator Art." *Photofile* 68 February-March, 2003.

Halberstam, Judith. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives.* New York and London: New York University Press, 2005.

Halberstam, Judith. *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters.* Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995.

Halberstam, Judith. and Ira Livingston. *Posthuman Bodies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

Hanauer, Cathi, (ed). *The Bitch in the House; 26 Women Tell the Truth About Sex, Solitude, Work, Motherhood and Marriage*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2003.

Haraway, Donna."A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." In *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, [1985], 1991 149-181. This text is also available at http://www.stanford.edu/dept/HPS/Haraway/CyborgManifesto.html.

Haraway, Donna. *Modest_Witness@Second_Millenium.FemaleMan©_Meets_Oncomouse (TM)*: Feminism and Technoscience. New York and London: Routledge, 1997.

Haraway, Donna. "Speculative Fabulations for Technoculture's Generations: Taking Care of Unexpected Country." Patricia Piccinini's website, 2007, available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/, date accessed 7/7/08.

Harcourt, Wendy, ed. *Women@Internet: Creating New Cultures in Cyberspace*. London: Zed Books, 1999.

Harding, Sandra. *The Science Question in Feminism*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986.

Harris, Monique. "The Road to Residual Profits Starts with a Subscription Web Site." *eWorking Women.com: Empowering You with Possibilities*, available at http://www.eworkingwomen.com/experts/paysub.html, date accessed 10/11/08.

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets. Director: Chris Columbus. With Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint, Emma Watson and Julie Walters. USA/UK/Germany. 1492 Pictures, 2002.

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix. Director: David Yates. With Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint, Emma Watson and Julie Walters. UK/USA, Warner Brothers, 2007.

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone. Director: Chris Columbus. With Richard Harris, Maggie Smith, Daniel Radcliffe, and Julie Walters. USA/UK. Warner Brothers Pictures, 2001.

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban. Director: Alfonso Cuaron. With Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint, Emma Watson, and Julie Walters. UK/USA. Warner Brothers Pictures, 2004.

Hattery, Angela. *Women, Work, and Family: Balancing and Weaving*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 2001.

Hausman, Bernice L. "The Feminist Politics of Breastfeeding." *Australian Feminist Studies* 19 45 (2004): 273-285.

Hawthorne, Susan. "Cyborgs, Virtual Bodies and Organic Bodies: Theoretical Feminist Responses." In *Cyberfeminism: Connectivity, Critique and Creativity*, edited by Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein. North Melbourne, Vic: Spinifex Press, 1999, 213-249.

Hayles, N. Katherine. "Flickering Connectivities in the work of Shelley Jackson: The Importance of Media-specific Analysis." *Postmodern Culture* 10, 2 January 2000,

available at http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern_culture/v010/10.2hayles.html, date accessed 4/7/02.

Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Hays, Sharon. *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.

Hays, Sharon. "The Fallacious Assumptions and Unrealistic Prescriptions of Attachment Theory: A Comment on 'Parents' Socioemotional Investment in Children.'" *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 60 3 August (1998): 782-790.

Heath, Deborah, Erin Koch, Barbara Ley, and Michael Montoya. "Nodes and Queries: Linking Locations in Networked Fields of Inquiry." *American Behavioral Scientist* 43 (1999): 450-63.

Heilbrun, Carolyn. *Reinventing Womanhood*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1979.

Hekman, Susan J, ed. *Feminism, Identity, and Difference*. New York: Routledge.

Hennessy, Peter. "Patricia Piccinini's Offspring." *Call of the Wild (Catalogue)*, MCA Sydney, 2002, available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/, date accessed 24/10/03.

Hermes, Joke. *Reading Women's Magazines: An Analysis of Everyday Media Use*. Oxford: Polity Press, 1999.

Hill, Peter. "Patricia Piccinini." *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2003, available at http://www.superfictions.com/elgrecol/PatriciaPiccinini.htm, date accessed 5/12/2005.

Hill, Shirley A. 'African American Mothers: Victimized, Vilified, and Valorized'in *Feminist Mothering* edited by Andrea O'Reilly. Albany: State University of New York, 2008, 107-121.

Hill Collins, Patricia. "Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorising About Motherhood." In *American Families: A Multicultural Reader*, edited by Stephanie Coontz, Maya Parson and Gabrielle Raley. New York and London: Routledge, 1999, 197- 217. This essay is also published in *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency*, edited by Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Grace Chang, and Linda Rennie Forcey. New York, London: Routledge, 1994, 45-66.

Hine, Christine. *Virtual Ethnography*. London: Sage Publications, Ltd, 2000.

Hip Mama, available at http://www.hipmama.com/

Hirsch, Marianne. *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989.

Hitchens, Christopher. "Why Women Aren't Funny." *Vanity Fair*, January 2007, available at http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2007/01/hitchens200701, date accessed 5/7/08.

Holliday, Ruth and John Hassard, eds. *Contested Bodies*. London: Routledge, 2001.

Holloway, Gerry. "Finding a Voice: on Becoming a Working-Class Feminist Academic." In *Class Matters: 'Working-Class' Women's Perspectives on Social Class*, edited by Pat

Mahony and Christine Zmroczek. London, Bristol PA: Taylor and Francis, 1997, 190-99.

Holmes, Janet and Meredith Marra. "Humour as Discursive Boundary Marker in Social Interaction." In *Us and Others*, edited by Anna Duszak, , (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002), 377-400.

Home and Away. Television series. Producer: John Holmes, Australia, 1987-present.

hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory: from margin to center*, 2nd Ed. London: Pluto Press, 2000.

Horniman, Joanne. *A Charm of Powerful Trouble*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2002.

Hoskin, Teri. "Bill Seaman; Red Dice/Des Chiffres." *Photofile (Tekne)* 60 August (2000): 53.

HotWired, available at hotwired.com, date accessed 2/5/08.

Hubbard, Ruth. *The Politics of Women's Biology*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press 1990.

Huggins, Jackie. *"Writing My Mother's Life" (Jackie Huggins on writing the biography of Rita Huggins)*. Hecate, 17, 1 May (1991): 88-95.

Huggins, Rita and Jackie Huggins. *Auntie Rita*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1994.

Hunter, Brenda. *Home by Choice: Raising Emotionally Secure Children in an Insecure World*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 2000.

Hustis, Harriet. "Responsible Creativity and the 'Modernity' of Mary Shelley's Prometheus." *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 43, 4 Autumn (2003): 845-858.

"Hypertext Resources." Eastgate Systems, Inc., available at http://www.eastgate.com/hypertext/Criticism.html, date accessed 2/7/08.

"Interview with Rosi Braidotti", available at http://users.skynet.be/nattyweb/RosiIInt.htm

Iovine, Vicki. *The Girlfriends' Guide to Surviving the First Year of Motherhood*. New York: Perigee Books, 1997.

Irigaray, Luce. "Women's Exile", trans. C. Venn. *Ideology and Consciousness* 1 Spring (1977): 62-76.

Isaak, Jo Anna. *Feminism & Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter*. London: Routledge, 1996.

"I Wanted to Give My Child to God:Killer Mother." *Sydney Morning Herald, smh.com.au*, 25th November 2004, available at http://www.smh.com.au/news/World/I-wanted-to-give-my-child-to-God-killer-mother/2004/11/24/1101219617415.html, date accessed 5/9/08.

Jackson, Shelley. *Ineradicable Stain*, available at http://www.ineradicablestain.com/reviews.html.

Jackson, Shelley. *My Body*, available at http://www.altx.com/thebody/, date accessed 21/2/05.

Jackson, Shelley. *Patchwork Girl.* Environment: Storyspace. Cambridge, Mass: Eastgate Systems, 1995.

Jackson, Shelley. *The Melancholy of Anatomy: Stories.* New York: Anchor Books, 2002.

Jackson, Stevi. "Ignorance is Bliss: When You are Just Seventeen." *Trouble and Strife* 33 (1996): 50-60.

Jagose, Annamarie. *Queer Theory.* Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996.

Jary, David and Julia Jary, eds. *Collins Dictionary of Sociology.* London: HarperCollins, 1991.

"Johnson & Johnson Acquires *BabyCenter* From eToys, Inc. Leading Online Destination for Parents Plans for Continued Expansion of Operations." Johnson & Johnson. New Brunswick, N.J. March 2, 2001, available at http://www.investor.jnj.com/releaseDetail.cfm?ReleaseID=63836, accessed 05/09/07.

Johnson, Lesley. "'Revolutions are not made by downtrodden housewives' Feminism and the Housewife." *Australian Feminist Studies* 15, 32 July (2000): 237- 248.

Johnson, Susan. *A Better Woman: A Memoir of Motherhood.* Scoresby, Vic: Random House Australia, 1999.

Johnson, Susan. *A Better Woman* – a memoir, *Susan Johnson – Australian author* – website and blog, available at http://www.abetterwoman.net/index.php?page=abw, date accessed 27/8/09.

Johnston, Deidre D and Debra H Swanson. "Invisible Mothers: A Content Analysis of Motherhood Ideologies and Myths in Magazines." *Sex Roles* 49, 1/2 July (2003): 21-31.

"Join the Bad Mothers Club." *Families SouthEast*, available at http://www.familiesonline.co.uk/article/articleview/443/1/45, date accessed 4/4/08.

Jones, Steve, ed. *Cybersociety: Computer-Mediated Communication and Community.* London: Sage, 1995.

Joyce, Michael. *Afternoon: A Story.* Environment; Storyspace. Cambridge, Mass: Eastgate Systems, 1995.

Joyce, Michael. "Nonce Upon Some Times: Rereading Hypertext Fiction." *Modern Fiction Studies* 43, 3 Fall (1997): 579-597. Also available at http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/modern_fiction_studies/v043/43.3joyce.html

Kaloski, Ann. "Bisexuals Making Out with Cyborgs: Politics, Pleasure, Con/fusion." *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies* 2, 1 January (1997): 47-64.

Kartinyeri, Doris E. *Kick the Tin.* North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2000.

Kath and Kim. Television series. Producers: Gina Riley and Jane Turner. Australia, 2002-present.

Katsh, M. Ethan. "Dispute Resolution in Cyberspace." Symposium: Legal Regulation of the Internet. *The Connecticut Law Review* 28 (1996): 953. Available online at http://www.umass.edu/legal/articles/uconn.html, date accessed 4/3/08.

Keenan, Catherine. "It's not your fault, Mum, so don't feel guilty". *The Sydney Morning Herald, smh.com.au*, January 31, 2005, available at http://www.smh.com.au/news/Books/Its-not-your-fault-Mum/2005/01/30/1107020258706.html, date accessed 29/8/09.

Keller, Kathryn. *Mothers and Work in Popular American Magazines.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994.

Kendall, Lori. "MUDer? I hardly know 'er! Adventures of a feminist MUDer." In *Wired Women: Gender and New Realities in Cyberspace*, edited by Lynn Cherney and Elizabeth Reba Weiss. Seattle: Seal Press, 1996, 207-23.

Kent, Rachel. "Fast Forward: Accelerated Evolution." *Call of the Wild (Catalogue)* 2000. Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/essay.php?id=21, 2002, date accessed 4/6/08.

Kenyon Review, available at http://www.kenyon-review.org/

Keep, Christopher, Tim McLaughlin and Robin Parmar. "Storyspace." *The Electronic Labyrinth*, 1993-2000, available at http://www3.iath.virginia.edu/elab/hfl0023.html

Kigler, Benjamin and Roberta A. Lee. *Integrative Medicine.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004.

Kirkup, Gill, Linda Janes, Kath Woodward and Fiona Hovenden eds. *The Gendered Cyborg: a Reader.* London: Routledge, 2000.

Kitzinger, Sheila. *Ourselves as Mothers: the Universal Experience of Motherhood.* Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1995.

Klein, Melanie. *Contributions to Psycho-Analysis, 1921-1945.* London: Hogarth Press, 1948.

Klein, Renate. "The Politics of Cyberfeminism: If I'm a Cyborg Rather than a Goddess will Patriarchy Go Away?" In *Cyberfeminism: Connectivity, Critique and Creativity*, edited by Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein. North Melbourne, Vic: Spinifex Press, 1999, 185-212.

Klein, Renate. "What's New About the New Technologies?" In *Man-Made Women: How New Reproductive Technologies Affect Women,* edited by Gena Corea, Jalna Hanmer, and Renate Klein. London: Hutchinson, 1985.

Klein, Renate. *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, Third Edition. London: Hogarth Press and the Insitute of Psycho-Analysis, 1949.

Kolko, Beth E, Lisa Nakamura, and Gilbert Rodman, eds. *Race in Cyberspace.* London: Routledge, 2000.

Koskimaa, Raine."Visual Structuring of Hyperfiction Narratives." *Hypertext Resources*, Eastgate Systems, Inc., available at http://www.altx.com/ebr/ebr6/6koskimaa/6koski.htm

Kotthoff, Helga. "Gender and Humour: The State of the Art." *Journal of Pragmatics* 38 (2006): 4-25.

Kristeva, Julia. "Approaching Abjection." In *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader,* edited by Amelia Jones. London: Routledge, [1980], 2003, 389-391.

Kristeva, Julia. *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.

Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.

Kristeva, Julia. "Motherhood according to Giovanni Bellini." In *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, edited by Leon Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, 241-242.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans Leon Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

Kristeva, Julia. "Stabat Mater." In *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Susan Rubin Suleiman. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986, 99-118.

Kristeva, Julia. *Tales of Love,* trans. Leon Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

Kristeva, Julia. "Word, Dialogue, and the Novel." In *The Kristeva Reader* edited by Toril Moi. New York: Colombia University Press, 1986, 35-61.

Kroker, Arthur and Michael A. Weinstein. *Data Trash: the Theory of the Virtual Class.* Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1994.

Kundera, Milan. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, translated by Michael Henry Heim. London: Faber and Faber, [1984] 2004.

Lacan, Jaques. *Ecrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Routledge, 1977.

Lambda Moo, available at telnet://lambda.moo.mud.org:8888/, date accessed, 27/8/07.

Lancashire, Rebecca. "Piccinini's Monsters." *The Age*, 25 May, 2001, Extra, p. 3

Landow, George P. *Hypertext 2.0: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, [1992] 1997.

Landow, George P. "Is this hypertext any good? Evaluating quality in hypermedia." Brown University, 3/04, available at http://www.brown.edu/Research/dichtung-digital/2004/3/Landow/index.htm, date accessed 3/12/05.

Landow, George P. "Stitching together narrative, sexuality, self: Shelley Jackson's 'Patchwork Girl'", August 2000, available at http://www.altx.com/ebr/reviews/rev3/landow.htm, date accessed 3/9/07.

Landow, George P. "The Definition of Hypertext and Its History as a Concept." In *The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*, Pages 3-4 in print version, The John Hopkins University Press, 1992, available at http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/cpace/ht/jhup/history.html, date accessed 17/4/2005.

Lavender, Bee. *A Beautiful Final Tribute.* Zine series.

Lavender, Bee. *Home page*, available at http://www.foment.net/index.html, date accessed 14/10/02.

Lavender, Bee. *Lessons in Taxidermy*. Chicago and New York: Punk Planet Books and Akashic Books, 2005.

Lavender, Bee and Maia Rossini. *Mamaphonic: Balancing Motherhood and Other Creative Acts*. Brooklyn: Soft Skull Press, 2004.

Law, Clarice S. "The Impact of Changing Parenting Styles on the Advancement of Pediatric Oral Health." *Journal of the Californian Dental Association* 35 3 (2007): 192-197.

Layne, Linda. "I Remember the Day I Shopped for Your Layette: Consumer Goods, Fetuses, and Feminism in the Context of Pregnancy Loss." In, *Fetal Subjects Feminist Positions*, edited by Lynn Morgan and Meredith Michaels. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999, 251-279.

Lazarre, Jane. *The Mother Knot*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976.

Legge, Kate. "Taking Stock of Motherhood." *Australian*, September 3-4, 2005. *Inquirer*, p. 25.

Leppert, Richard. *Art and the Committed Eye: The Cultural Functions of Imagery*. Boulder: Westview/HarperCollins, 1996.

Lemaire, Anika., *Jacques Lacan*. Trans. David Macey. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, [1970], 1977.

Lette, Kathy. *Foetal Attraction*. Hamburg: Petersen-Buchimport, 1999.

Levy, Barbara. *Ladies Laughing: Wit as Control in Contemporary Women Writers*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Levy, Michelle. "Discovery and the Domestic Affections in Coleridge and Shelley." *Studies in English Literature, 1500 – 1900* 44, 4 Autumn (2004): 693- 715.

Lewin, Ellen. *Lesbian Mothers, Accounts of Gender in American Culture*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993.

Lewis, Tania. "Transforming Citizens? Green Politics and Ethical Consumption on Lifestyle Television." *Continuum*, 22, 2, (2008): 227 – 240. Online Publication date, 1st April, 2008, available at http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10304310701864394, date accessed 2nd June, 2008.

Ley Jennifer. "Women and Technology, Beyond the Binary A Roundtable Discussion with N. Katherine Hayles, Marjorie Perloff, Diane Greco, Linda Carroli and Shelly Jackson." *Riding the Meridian*, available at http://www.heelstone.com/meridian/rtable3.html

Liar, Liar. Director: Tom Shadyac, With Jim Carrey, Maura Tierney, Justin Cooper, Cary Elwes. USA, Imagine Entertainment, 1997.

Linstead, Stephen. "Organizational Kitsch." *Organization* 9, 4 (2002): 657-682.

Lohr, Nikol. *Disgruntled Housewife*, available at http://www.disgruntledhousewife.com/, date accessed 6/9/09.

Lowenthal, David. *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Lublin, Nancy. *Pandora's Box: Feminism Confronts Reproductive Technology*. Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997.

Luke, Carmen. "Childhood and Parenting in Children's Popular Culture and Child Care Magazines." In *Feminisms and Pedagogies of Everyday Life*, edited by Carmen Luke. SUNY Press, 1996, 167-187.

LUMP available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/, date accessed 27/3/08.

Lupton,Deborah and Greg Noble. "Just a machine? Dehumanizing Strategies in Personal Computer Use." *Body and Society* 3, 2 (1997): 83-101.

Lury, Celia. *Consumer Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1966.

Luscombe, Brenda. "Mommy Talks Back." *Time.com*, May, 13, 2002, available at http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1002433-2,00.html, date accessed 18/4/09.

Lynch, Megan. "A Conversation with Shelley Jackson." *Random House*, available at http://www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0402/jackson/interview.html accessed 20/6/02.

McCaffery, Larry. "As Guilty as the Rest of Them: An Interview with Robert Coover." *Critique* 42, 1 Fall (2000): 115-127. Available at http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=62817415&sid=1&Fmt=3&clientId=20931&RQT=309&VName=PQD, p. 5 of 7, date accessed 7/8/05.

McCracken, Ellen. *Decoding Women's Magazines From Mademoiselle to Ms*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.

McCullough, Kate. "Of Women (but not Man or the Nuclear Family) Born: Motherhood Outside Institutionalized Heterosexuality." In *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born*, edited by Andrea O'Reilly. New York: SUNY Press, 2004, pp. 103-124.

McElroy, Wendy. "Breeder Reactionaries: The "feminist" War on Reproductive Technologies." *Reason Online*, December 1994, available at http://www.reason.com/news/show/29569.html, date accessed 26/9/00.

McFedries, Paul. *Word Spy, Frankenfood*, available at http://wordspy.com/words/Frankenfood.asp

McIntosh, Peggy. "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack", available at http://www.lilithgallery.com/feminist/modern/WhitePrivilege-MalePrivilege.html, date accessed 17/9/09.

McKinley, Tamara. *Windflowers*. London: Priatkus, 2002.

McLaughlin, Emma and Nicola Kraus. *The Nanny Diaries*. New York: St Martin's Press, 2002.

McNamara, Melissa. "Andrea Yates Found Not Guilty By Reason of Insanity; Will be Committed to Sate Mental Hospital." *CBS News,* Houston, July 26, 2006, available at http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/07/26/national/main1837248.shtml, date accessed 5/9/09.

McRobbie, Angela, ed. *Back to Reality? Social Experience and Cultural Studies.* Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997.

McRobbie, Angela, ed. *Feminism and Youth Culture: From Jackie to Just Seventeen.* Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991.

McRobbie, Angela, ed. *More*! New Sexualities in Girls' and Women's Magazines." In *Back to Reality? Social Experience and Cultural Studies,* edited by Angela McRobbie. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997, 190-209.

Macintyre, Sally. "Who Wants Babies? The Social Construction of Instincts." In *Sexual Divisions and Society: Process and Change* edited by Diana Leonard, Diana Barker and Sheila Allen. London: Tavistock Publications, 1976, 150- 173.

Madge, Clare and Henrietta O'Connor "Parenting Gone Wired: Empowerment of New Mothers on the Internet?" *Social & Cultural Geography* 7, 2 (2006): 199-220.

Maher, JaneMaree. "Rethinking Women's Birth Experience: Medical Frameworks and Personal Narratives." *Hecate* 29, 2 (2003): 140-153.

Maher, JaneMaree. "Talking About Policy, Mothering and Work: A Review Essay." *Hecate, Australian Women's Book Review,* January 1, 2006. Available at http://emsah.uq.edu.au/awsr/new_site/awbr_archive/141/talkingaboutpolicy.html, date accessed 27/8/09.

Markham, Annette. "The Methods, Politics, and Ethics of Representation in Online Ethnography." In *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research,* edited by K. Denzin and Yvonne S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2005, 793-820.

Mama Mia: A Memoir of Mistakes, Magazines and Motherhood, advertisement at Booktopia, available at http://www.booktopia.com.au/mama-mia-a-memoir-of-mistakes-magazines-and-motherhood/prod9780732281892.html, date accessed 29/8/09.

Manne, Anne. *Motherhood: How Should We Care for Our Children?* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2005.

Markula, Pirkula. "Beyond the Perfect Body: Women's Body Image Distortion in Fitness Magazine Discourse." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 25, 2 (2001): 158-179.

Marshall, Helen. "Our Bodies, Ourselves: Why We Should Add Old Fashioned Empirical Phenomenology to the New Theories of the Body." In *Feminist Theory and the Body,* edited by Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999, 64-76.

Martin, Emily. *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction.* Buckingham: Open University Press, 1987.

Mason, Linda. *The Working Mother's Guide to Life: Strategies, Secrets, and Solutions.* New York: Three Rivers Press, 2002.

Maternitymall.com. (Currently known as *Destination Maternity*), available at http://www.maternitymall.com/home.asp

Maushart, Susan. *The Mask of Motherhood: How Becoming a Mother Changes Everything And Why We Pretend It Doesn't.* New York: New Press, 1999.

Maxwell, Kerry. 'New Word of Mouth.' *Macmillan English Dictionaries Magazine* 31 June (2005) available at http://www.macmillandictionaries.com/MED-Magazine/June2005/31-New-Word-BBQ.htm, date accessed 6/10/09.

Mean-Ferro, Muffy. *Confessions of a Slacker Mom.* San Francisco, CA: Prince-Nez Press, 2004.

Meekosha, Helen. "Virtual Activists? Women and the Making of Identities of Disability." *Hypatia* 17, 3, Summer (2002): 67-88.

Mellor, Anne K. *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters.* New York: Routledge, 1988).

Mellor, Anne K. "On Feminist Utopias." *Women's Studies* 9 (1982): 241-262.

Mellor, Anne K, Audrey A. Fisch, Esther H. Schor. *The Other Mary Shelley: Beyond Frankenstein.* New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Mellor, Christie. *The Three-Martini Playdate: A Practical Guide to Happy Parenting.* San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2004.

Merchant, Carolyn. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution.* San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980.

Millard, Rosie. "Thanks, Britney, from all bad mothers." *Times Online*, 20th January, 2008, available at http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/women/families/article3215277.ece, date accessed 21 January, 2008.

Millett, Kate, *Sexual Politics.* London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1971.

Mitchell, Lisa M. and Eugenia Georges. "Baby's First Picture: the Cyborg Fetus of Ultrasound Imaging." In *Cyborg Babies: from Techno-sex to Techno-tots*, edited by Robbie Davis-Floyd and Joseph Dumit. London: Routledge, 1998, 105-124.

Modleski, Tania. *Loving With A Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women* London: Methuen, 1984.

Moreton-Robinson. Aileen, *Talkin' Up To The White Woman: Indigenous Women And Feminism.* St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2000.

Morgan, Sally. *My Place.* Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1987.

Mothers Work Inc. Available http://motherswork.com/Home.asp, date accessed 04/09/07.

Mothers Work, Inc. Company Profile Snapshot, *WrightReports,* Wright Investors' Service, available http://wrightreports.ecnext.com/com2/reportdesc_COMPANY_619903107, date accessed 04/09/07.

Mothers Work Inc. "Who are we", available at http://www.motherswork.som/Whoarewe.asp, date accessed 04/09/07.

Moulthrop, Stuart. "Rhizome and Resistance: Hypertext and the Dreams of a New Culture." In *Hyper/Text/Theory*, edited by George P. Landow. London: John Hopkins University Press, 1994, 299-320.

Moulthrop, Stuart. *Victory Garden.* Environment: Storyspace. Cambridge, Mass: Eastgate Systems, 1995.

"Mummy lit." *Bookseller.com*, 12th March, 2007, available at http://www.thebookseller.com/news/35421-time-right-for-mummy-lit.html, date accessed 29/3/08.

MumShirl. *MumShirl: An Autobiography*, with the assistance of Bobbi Sykes. Richmond, Vic: Heinemann Educational, 1981.

'Mum Shirl', Koori Freedom Fighters, *The Koori History Website*, available at http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/heroes5.html, date accessed 22/9/09.

Murphy, Bren Ortega. "Women's Magazines: Confusing differences." In *Differences that Make a Difference: Examining the Assumptions of Gender Research*, edited by Lynn H. Turner and Helen M. Sterk. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994, 119-127.

Murphy, Ann Pleshette. *The 7 Stages of Motherhood: Loving Your Life Without Losing Your Mind.* New York: Anchor Books, 2006.

"My life as a slob mother." *The Age, theage.com.au*, April 9, 2003. available at http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/04/09/1049567738355.html.

Nakamura, Lisa. "'Where do you want to go today?' Cybernetic tourism, the internet, and transnationality." In Kolko, Beth E, Lisa Nakamura, and Gilbert Rodman, eds. *Race in Cyberspace.* London: Routledge, 2000, 15-26.

Nakano Glenn, Evelyn, Grace Chang and Linda Rennie Forcey, eds. *Mothering: Ideology, Experience and Agency.* New York and London: Routledge, 1994.

Nanjo, Fumio. "Dangerously cute: Noi Sawaragi and Fumio Nanjo discuss contemporary Japanese Culture." *Flash Art (International Edition)* 163 Mar/Apr (1992): 75-77.

Nash, Chris and Shirley Alexander. "The Creative Nation Cultural Policy: Will it play in Australia Street?" Proceedings of the Australian Unix and Open Systems Users Group [AUUG] and Asia-Pacific World Wide Web '95 Conference and Exhibition, Friday 21st May, 2004, available at http://www.csu.edu.au/special/conference/apwww95/papers95/cnash/cnash.html, date accessed 30/5/09.

National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families. Ronald Wilson (Commissioner). *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families.* Sydney: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, April 1997.

Nava., Mica. "Women, the City and the Department Store." In *The Shopping Experience*, edited by Pasi Falk. and Colin Campbell. London, UK: Sage, London, 1997, 56-91.

Neighbours. Television series. Producer: FreemantleMedia, Pty Ltd, Australia, 1985-present.

Neill, Fiona. *The Secret Life of a Slummy Mummy.* London: Century The Random House Group Ltd, 2007.

Nelson, Robert. "Clever Technology, Serious Questions." *The Age*, Saturday, January 4, 2003, Arts 17.

Nelson, Ted. *Literary Machines: The report on, and of, Project Xanadu Concerning Word Processing, Electronic Publishing, Hypertext, Thinkertoys, Tomorrow's Intellectual Revolution, and Certain Other Topics Including Knowledge, Education and Freedom.* Sausalito, California: Mindful Press, 1981.

Noll, Michael. *Highway of Dreams: A Critical View along the Information Superhighway.* Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1997.

Nunes, Rosita. "Written on (and under) the skin: an interview with Shelley Jackson." *Tattoo Highway*, available at http://www.tattohighway.org/8/sjinterview.html

Oakley, Ann. *From Here to Maternity: Becoming a Mother.* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981.

Oliver, Kelly. *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-bind.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993.

O'Malley, Lisa. "Does My Bump Look Big in This?" *Advertising & Society Review* 7, 3 (2006). This journal is published electronically and distributed through Project Muse of the John Hopkins University Press.

O'Reilly, Andrea, ed. *Feminist Mothering.* New York: SUNY Press, 2008.

O'Reilly, Andrea, ed. *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born.* New York: State University of New York Press, 2004.

O'Reilly, Andrea, ed. *Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering.* Toronto: Women's Press, 2004.

O'Reilly, Andrea. *Profile and list of texts*, York University, available at http://www.yorku.ca/arm/andreaoreilly.html, date accessed 18/4/09.

Orgaz, Laura Fernandez. "The Naturally Artificial World: A Conversation Between Patricia Piccinini and Laura Fernandez Orgaz." Reproduced with permission from the catalogue for the exhibition "Tender Creatures" at Artium, Spain, 2007, available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/, date accessed 22/1/08.

Ormesher, Pat. ''Roberta Sykes Remembers MumShirl', *Redfern Oral History*, available at http://redfernoralhistory.org/OralHistory/RobertaSykesonMumShirl/tabid/145/Default.aspx, date accessed 22/9/09.

OzArts. Australia Council for the Arts, available at http://www.ozarts.com.au/home, date accessed 5/6/09.

Ozco_News. The Australia Council Newsletter Issue 2 May 2003, produced by the Communication Unit, the Australia Council, Sydney, Australia. Available online at www.ozco.gov.au

Packed to the Rafters. Television series. Producer: Jo Porter, Australia, 2008-present.

Palmer, Daniel. "Interview with Patricia Piccinini and Peter Hennessey." *RealTime*, 2001, available on Patricia Piccinini's website at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/, date accessed 9/8/2002.

ParentCenter.com, available at http://www.parentcenter.com.

Parker Rozsika and Griselda Pollock. *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology.* New York: Pantheon, 1981.

Parker, Sheila, Mimi Nichter, Mark Nichter, Nancy Vuckovic, Colette Sims, and Cheryl Ritenbaugh. "Body Image and Weight Concerns among African American and White Adolescent Females: Differences that Make a Difference." *Human Organization* 54, 2 Summer (1995): 103-114.

Parents, Magazine Subscription Network, available at http://www.magsn.com/parents-p-77.html, date accessed 6/2/09.

Pascoe, Caroline Myra. *Screening Mothers: Representations of Motherhood in Australian Films 1900 to 1988.* Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. University of Sydney. September, 1998. Thesis available at http://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/bitstream/2123/385/11/adt-NU1999.0010chapter8.pdf.

Passion Fish. Director John Sayles. With Mary McDonnell, Alfre Woodard. Atchafalaya, 1992.

"Patchwork Girl Comments." Brown University, U.S.A available at http://scholars.nus.edu.sg/cpace/ht/pg/pgov.html

Pearson, Allison. *I Don't Know How She Does It.* London: Vintage, 2002.

Pearson, Allison. *Reading Group Guides.com*, available at http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides3/i_dont_know_how_she_does_it2.asp, date accessed 29/11/06.

Pennings, Mark."Enchantment, Technoscience and Desire." *Art and Australia* 37, 4 (2000): 556-564.

Peri, Camille and Kate Moses. 'Mothers Who Think', available at *Salon.com.*

Peri, Camille and Kate Moses. *Mothers Who Think: Tales of Real Life Parenting.* New York: Washington Square Press, 2000.

Petchesky, Rosalind. "Foetal Images: The Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction." In *Reproductive Technologies: Gender, Motherhood, and Medicine*, edited by Michelle Stanworth. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, 57-80. Also published in *The Gendered Cyborg: a Reader*, edited by Gill Kirkup, Linda Janes, Kath Woodward and Fiona Hovenden. London: Routledge, 2000, 171-192.

Petchesky, Rosalind. "Reproductive Freedom: Beyond a Woman's Right to Choose." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5 (1980): 661-685.

Petry, Ann. *The Street.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, [1946] 1998.

Philipkoski, Kristen. "Cracking the Frankenfood Code." *Wired Magazine*, posted October 2003, available at http://www.wired.com/news/medtech/0,1286,60911,00.html

Phillips, David J. "Defending the Boundaries: Identifying and Countering Threats in a Usenet Newsgroup." *The Information Society*, Vol 12, No 1 (1996): 39-62.

Piccinini, Patricia. *Artist Profile.* Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, Australia, available at http://www.roslynoxley9.com.au/artists/31/Patricia_Piccinini/profile/, date accessed 2/7/08.

Piccinini, Patricia. "Bodyguard." Artist Statement for Robert Miller Gallery, NYC, 2004, available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/, date accessed 24/10/2005.

Piccinini, Patricia. *patriciapicciniininet* available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/

Piccinini, Patricia. *Patricia Piccinini: Unbreaking Eggs*. Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, September 2005, available at http://www.kunstaspekte.de/index.php?tid=17135&action=termin, date accessed 30/5/09.

Piccinini, Patricia. "Public Lecture – Tokyo Art University." Faculty of Fine Arts, National University of Fine Arts and Music, December 8th 2003, available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/, date accessed 7/9/05.

Piccinini, Patricia. *Retrospectology: the World According to Patricia Piccinini*, 21/12/2002 – 2/3/2003, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, (ACCA), Sturt Street, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

Piccinini, Patricia. Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, Australia, available at http://www.roslynoxley9.com.au/artists/31/Patricia_Piccinini/249/, date accessed 21/10/09.

Piccinini, Patricia. "Truck Babies Artist Statement", available at http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/essay.php?id=11

Pierce, Julianne. "Australian New Media: an Active Circuit." *Artlink* 21 3 (2001): 12- 14.

Pioch, Nicholas. "Titian." *Web Museum*, October 14, 2002, available at http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/titian/, date accessed 2/8/08.

Pizzini, Franca. "Communication Hierarchies in Humour: Gender Differences in the Obstetrical/Gynaecological Setting." *Discourse and Society* 2, 4 (1991): 477-488.

Pocock, Barbara. *The Work/Life Collision: What Work is Doing to Australians and What to do About It*. Annandale, NSW: Federation Press, 2003.

Pocock, Barbara and Jane Clarke. "Can't Buy Me Love? Young Australians' Views on Parental Work, Time, Guilt and Their Own Consumption." *Discussion Paper Number 61*, February 2004, The Australia Institute, available at http://www.barbarapocock.com.au/documents/cant_buy_me_love_summary.pdf, date accessed 30/11/06.

Politics of Cyberfeminism Conference, Saturday, 21 September 1996 at Deakin University available at http://www.spinifexpress.com.au/cf/cybercon.htm, date accessed 29/4/02.

Pollin, Burton R. "Philosophical and Literary Sources of Frankenstein." *Comparative Literature* 17, 2 Spring (1965): 97-108.

"Post-baby slim downs, Hollywood style." *Celebrity Moms*, 12th January, 2006, available at http://celebrity-moms.blogspot.com/2006_01_01_celebrity-moms_archive.html, 25/1/06, date accessed 7/1/07.

Practical Parenting, available at http://www.pacificmags.com.au/Pages/Magazines/Magazine.aspx?mid=4859795a-20b7-49c7-9afc-b4f0f41e6555, date accessed 31/01/08.

Pregnancy Magazine. Australia. May/June 2004.

Price, Janet and Margaret Shildrick. *Feminist Theory and the Body*. Edinburgh: Edingburgh University Press and New York: Routledge, 1999.

Quantcast, available at http://www.quantcast.com/

Rader, Walter, ed. *The Online Slang Dictionary*, available at http://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~wrader/slang/index.html

Radway, Janice. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, reprint, 1991.

Randles, Jackie. *Hybrid Life: the Art of Patricia Piccinini. Living Ethics* 57, Spring 2004, available at http://www.ethics.org.au/about-ethics/ethics-centre-articles/ethics-subjects/science/article-0392.html, date accessed 21/8/04.

Rauch, Jonathan. "Will Frankenfood save the planet?" *The Atlantic Monthly*, October 2003, available at http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2003/10/rauch.htm

Raymond, Janice. *Women as Wombs: Reproductive Technologies and the Battle over Women's Freedom*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993.

Razzle Dazzle – A Journey into Dance. Director: Darren Ashton. With Ben Miller, Kerry Armstrong, Nadine Garner. Australia, Palace Films, 2007.

Reekie, Gail. *Measuring Immorality: Social Inquiry and the Problem of Illegitimacy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Reiger, Kereen. *Our Bodies, Our Babies: The Forgotten Women's Movement*. Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2001.

Rheingold, Howard. *The Virtual Community* available at http://www.rheingold.com/vc/book/intro.html

Rheingold, Howard. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. London: MIT Press, 2000.

Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. London: Virago, 1979.

Riot Grrrl Online, available at http://www.hot-topic.org/riotgrrrl/, date accessed 5/7/08.

Robins, Kevin. "Cyberspace And The World We Live In." In *The Cybercultures Reader*, edited by David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy. London: Routledge, 2000, 77-95.

Robins, Kevin and Frank Webster, *Times of the Technoculture: From the Information Society to the Virtual Life*. London: Routledge, 1999.

Robinson, Amy. "New Media Art – Interactive Art." *M/Cyclopedia of New Media*, available at http://wiki.media-culture.org.au/index.php/New_Media_Art_-_Interactive_Art, October 2005, date accessed 2/10/08.

Robson, Ruthann. "Mother: The Legal Domestication of Lesbian Existence." In *Mothers in Law: Feminist Theory and the Legal Regulation of Motherhood*, edited by Martha Albertson Fineman and Isabel Karpin. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.

Roman, Leslie G. and Linda Eyre, eds. *Dangerous Territories: Struggles for Difference and Equality in Education*. New York:Routledge, 1997.

Rose, Deborah Bird. *Reports from a Wild Country: Ethics for Decolonisation*. Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2004.

Rosie X. *Geekgirl*, available at http://www.geekgirl.com.au/blog/, date accessed 6/9/09.

Rosie X. "Interview with Sadie Plant." *Geekgirl*, Issue 001, 1995, available at http://www.geekgirl.com.au/geekgirl/archives/index.shtml, date accessed 12/9/00.

Rossner, S.V. "Through the Lenses of Feminist Theory: Focus on Women and Technology." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 26, 1 (2005): 23.

Rowe, Kathleen. "Roseanne: Unruly Woman as Domestic Goddess." *Screen*, 31, 4 (1990): 410-414.

Ruddick, Sara. "Maternal Thinking." *Feminist Studies* 6, no 2 Summer (1980): 342-67.

Russell, Danielle. "Self-Deprecatory Humour and the Female Comic: Self- Destruction or Comedic Construction?" *Thirdspace* 2, 1 November (2002), available at http://thirdspace.ca/articles/druss.htm, date accessed 7/9/08.

Saco, Diana. *Cybering Democracy: Public Space and the Internet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

Sainsbury, Alison. Review of *Quibbling* by Carolyn Guyer. Eastgate Systems, Inc, available at http://www.eastgate.com/catalog/Quibbling.html, date accessed 9/10/07.

Salon (1995-1996), available at http://www.salon.com/src/pass/sitepass/spon/sitepass_website.html, date accessed 2/5/08.

Sawchuk, Kim. "Biotourism, Fantastic Voyage, and Sublime Inner Space." In *Wild Science: Reading Feminism, Medicine and the Media*, edited by Janine Marchessault and Kim Sawchuk. London and New York: Routledge, 2000, 9-23.

Sawicki, Jana. "Disciplining Mothers: Feminism and the New Reproductive Technologies." In *Feminist Theory and the Body*, edited by Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991, 190-202.

"SA Women Vie For World Breastfeeding Record." AAP General News (Australia), 4th August, 1999, available at http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P1-22479996.html, date accessed 20/8/09.

Schaible, Peter A. "Why this is the perfect time to start charging for website subscriptions." Subscription Website Publishers Association, 2003, *PowerHomeBiz.com*, available at http://www.powerhomebiz.com/vol114/subscription.htm, date accessed 14/1/09.

Schaupp, L. Christian and France Belanger. "A Conjoint Analysis of Online Consumer Satisfaction." *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research* 6, 2 (2005): 95-111.

Scheibe, Amy. *What Do You Do All Day*? New York: St Martin's Press, 2005.

Schuber, Robert. "Patricia Piccinini: Fetal Futures." *Art + Text* 54 (1996): 33-35.

Seal Press. "About us", available at http://www.sealpress.com/about.php, date accessed 26/8/09.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*. New York, London: Harvester, Wheatsheaf, 1991.

"See MAAP in Beijing Olympics Cultural Project." *Synthetic Times: Media Art China 2008*, 16th May 2008, available at http://www.maap.org.au/, date accessed 10/7/08.

Seidel, Erica. "The Hypertextuality of Scars." *Patchwork Girl Comments, Etc*, available at http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/cpace/ht/pg/espatch.html, date accessed 7/7/08.

Segura, Denise A. "Working at Motherhood: Chicana and Mexican Immigrant Mothers and Employment." In *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency*, edited by Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Grace Chang, and Linda Rennie Forcey. New York and London: Routledge, 1994, 211-233.

Senjen, Rye and Jane Guthrey. *The Internet for Women*. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1996.

Serial Mom. Director: John Waters. With Kathleen Turner, Sam Waterston, Ricki Lake, and Mathew Lillard. USA, Polar Entertainment Corporation, 1994.

Shah, James Y. and Wendi L. Gardner. *Handbook of Motivation Science*. New York: Guilford Press, 2008.

Shields, Rob. "Hypertext links: the ethic of the index and its space-time effects." In *The World Wide Web and Contemporary Cultural Theory*, edited by Andrew Herman and Thomas Swiss. London: Routledge, 2000, 145-160.

Shelley, Mary. Paul Hunter, ed. *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus*. Norton Critical Edition, New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1996.

Shildrick, Margrit. *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002.

Shildrick, Margrit. "This Body which is not One: Dealing with Differences." *Body and Society* 5, 2-3 (1999): 77-92.

Shnall, Marianne. *Feminist.com* available at http://www.feminist.com/

Shor, Ester, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Showalter, Elaine. "Piecing and Writing." In *The Poetics of Gender*, edited by Nancy K. Miller. New York: Colmumbia University Press, 1986, 222-247.

Showalter, Elaine. *Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.

Skeggs, Beverley. *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997.

Slevin, James. *The Internet and Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000.

Sloane, Sarah. *Digital Fictions: Storytelling in a Material World.* Stamford, Connecticutt: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2000.

Smith, Kimberly. "Mere Nostalgia: Notes on a Progressive Paratheory." *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 3, 4 (2000): 505–27.

Snow, Marnie-Anne, Amy Robinson and Heike Herrling. "New Media Art." *M/Cyclopedia of New Media*, available at http://wiki.media-culture.org.au/index.php/New_Media_Art, October 2005, date accessed 2/10/08.

Sotira, Angelo. CEO, *deviantART*, founded April 2000, available at http://www.deviantart.com/#, date accessed 1/2/2008.

Spender, Dale. *Nattering on the Net: Women, Power and Cyberspace.* Toronto: Garamand Press, 1996.

Spender, Dale. Excerpt from *Nattering on the Net*, published on the Spinifex Press website, available at http://www.spinifexpress.com.au/cf/cybercon.htm, date accessed 29/4/02.

Stabile, Carol A. *Feminism and the Technological Fix.* Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994.

Stack, Carol B. and Linda M. Burton. "Kinscripts: Reflections on Family, Generation and Culture." In *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency*, edited by Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Grace Chang, and Linda Rennie Forcey. New York and London: Routledge, 1994, 33-44.

Stafford, Barbara. *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine.* Cambridge, Mass, MIT Press, 1991.

Stanberg, Susan. "Jeff Koons has a "Ta-Da" Moment in Chicago", available at http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=92873040, National Public Radio Web site, (USA), date accessed 1/8/2008.

Steedman, Carolyn Kay. *Landscape For A Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives.* London: Virago, 1986.

Steel Magnolias. Director: Herbert Ross. With Sally Field, Dolly Parton, Shirley MacLaine, and Olympia Dukakis. USA, Dolby, 1989.

Stenger, Nicole. "Mind is a leaking rainbow." In *Cyberspace: First Steps,* edited by Michael Benedikt. Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1991, 48-57.

Stevens, Lorna and Pauline Maclaran. "Exploring the 'Shopping Imaginary': The Dreamworld of Women's Magazines." *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 4, 4 June (2005): 282-292.

Stevenson, Brenda E. *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Stewart, Sarah. *The Use of Internet Resources by Midwives in New Zealand.* A thesis submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (Applied) in Midwifery. Victoria University of Wellington, 2001, available in pdf online, date accessed 24/7/09.

Sterling, Greg. "Rise of the "Mom Networks." Blog, *WordPress.com*, available at http://gesterling.wordpress.com/2006/10/19/rise-of-the-mom-networks/, date accessed 07/09/07.

Stivale, Charles J. *The Rhizomatics of Cyberspace,* available at gopher://lists.village.virginia.edu:70/00pubs/listservs/spoons/deleuze-guattari.archive/papers/stiv.rhi, date accessed 3/5/07.

Stoll, Clifford. *Silicon Snake Oil: Second Thoughts on the Information Highway.* New York: Doubleday, 1995.

Strickland, Katrina. "Patricia's Baby: The darling of Australian Art, Patricia Piccinini, Shows her Lovable Mutants to the World." *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, May 3-4, 2003, 14-17.

Stroller, Debbie, Marcelle Karp and Laurie Henzel. *Bust* available at http://www.bust.com/index.php

Stuart, Andrea. "Feminism: Dead or Alive?" In *Identity: Community, Culture, and Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990, 28-42.

Stukator, Angela. "It's Not Over Until the Fat Lady Sings: Comedy, the Carnivalesque, and the Body Politics." In *Bodies Out of Bounds: Fatness and Transgression*, edited by Jana Evans Braziel and Kathleen LeBesco. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2001, 197-212.

Suleiman, Susan Rubin. "Writing and Motherhood" In *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation,* edited by Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane, and Madelon Sprengnether. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985, 352-77.

Sunderland, Jane. "'Parenting' or 'mothering'? The case of modern childcare magazines." *Discourse & Society* 17, 4 (2006): 503-528.

Sunstein, Emily W. *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991.

"Supermums turn science on its head." *Sydney Morning Herald, smh.com.au*, 14, November 2007, available at http://www.smh.com.au/news/beijing2008/supermums-turn-science-on-its-head/2007/11/14/1194766737525.html, date accessed 6/9/09.

Tannock. Stuart. "Nostalgia Critique." *Cultural Studies* 9, 3 (1995): 453–64.

Taylor, Charles R, and Ju Yung Lee. "Not in Vogue: Portrayals of Asian Americans in Magazine Advertising," *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing.* 13 2 Fall (1994): 239-245.

Taylor, Janelle S. "Of Sonograms and Baby Prams: Prenatal Diagnosis, Pregnancy, and Consumption." *Feminist Studies* 26, 2 Summer (2000): 391-418.

"Teaching Literature and Writing With Technology." Department of English, University of California, Los Angeles, United States of America, available at http://www.english.ucla.edu/ta/tacsite/495Esyllabus.htm

'(Tender) Creatures, Patricia Piccinini'. *Artium.* From October 2007 to January 27 2008, available at http://www.artium.org/ingles/expo_picinini.html, date accessed 21/10/09.

The Blue Planet. BBC series 2005, narrated by David Attenborough.

The Cosby Show. Television series. Producer: NBC, United States of America, 1984-1992.

The Dictionary of Anthropology, AnthroBase.com, available at http://www.anthrobase.com/

"The Emergence of a Networked World: Commerce, Society and the Future of the Internet." *Global Internet Project*, available at http://www.witsa.org/gip/papers/gip2f.htm, date accessed 2/5/08.

"The Essential Hip Mama." *Groundbreaking books. For Women. By Women,* available at http://www.sealpress.com/book.php?isbn=9781580051231, date accessed 18/5/09.

"The Gothic Novel." The University of Adelaide Library Website, available at http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/themes/gothic.html, date accessed 2/7/07.

The Hand That Rocks The Cradle. Director Curtis Hanson. With Annabella Sciorra, Rebecca de Mornay, Matt McCoy, Ernie Hudson. Hollywood Pictures, 1992.

The Happy Housewife available at http://ahappyhousewife.blogspot.com/2006/06/scrummy-slummy-mummy.html, date accessed 2/4/08.

The Incredibles. Director: Brad Bird. With Craig T. Nelson, Holly Hunter, Samuel L. Jackson and Jason Lee. USA Walt Disney Pictures, 2004.

The Long Walk Home. Director Richard Pearce. With Sissy Spacek, Whoopi Goldberg. Dave Bell Associates, 1990.

The Macquarie Dictionary, Third Edition, edited by Arthur Delbridge, John Bernard, David Blair, Susan Butler, Pam Peters, and Colin Yallop Sydney: Macquarie University, NSW, [1981], 1997.

The Nanny Diaries. Directors: Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini. With Scarlett Johansson, Donna Murphy, John Henry Cox and Laura Linney. USA, The Weinstein Company, 2007.

The New Yorker. "About Us", available at http://www.newyorker.com/magazine, date accessed 15/8/08.

The Office. Ricky Gervais, Stephen Merchant, Greg Daniels. BBC, UK, 2001-2003 and NBC, USA, 2005-present.

The Times, Times Online, available at http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/tools_and_services/subscriptions/article4438217.ece, date accessed 6/2/09.

The Utne Reader. In Ariel Gore's "School for Wayward Writers", January 5, 2009, available at http://www.arielgore.blogspot.com/, date accessed 2/2/09.

The Wall Street Journal, available at www.wsj.com, date accessed 6/2/09.

"The World Health Organization's Infant Feeding Recommendation." World Health Organization, available at http://www.who.int/nutrition/topics/infantfeeding_recommendation/en/index.html, date accessed 29/8/09.

Thomas, Angela. "Patchwork Girl" available at http://anya.blogsome.com/2005/08/06/stitching-texts-gender-and -geography-in-frankenstein-and-patchwork-girl/

Thompson, Craig J. "Caring Consumers: Gendered Consumption Meanings and the Juggling Lifestyle." *The Journal of Consumer Research,* Vol 22, No. 4 March (1996): 388-407.

Thomsen, Marilyn. *From Here to Maternity: a Career Woman's Journey into Motherhood.* Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publication Association, 1987.

Thornton Dill, Bonnie. "Our Mother's Grief: Racial Ethnic Women and the Maintenance of Families." *Journal of Family History* 13 (1988): 415-431.

Thurer, Shari. *Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother.* London: Penguin, 1995.

Time Inc, 'Practical Parenting Records the Strongest Growth in the Parenting Category with a 3.5 Percent Increase Year on Year', 19/2/07, available at http://www.timeinc.com.au/news/Practical_Parenting_News/19_2_2007_Practical_Parenting_records_the_strongest_growth_in_the_parenting_category_with_a_3.5_percent_increase_year-on-year.aspx.

Toffoletti, Kim. *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls: Feminism, Popular Culture and the Posthuman Body.* London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007.

Toffoletti, Kim. "Imagining the Posthuman: Patricia Piccinini and the Art of Simulation." *Outskirts: Feminisms Along the Edge* 11 (2003) available at http://www.chloe.uwa.edu.au/outskirts/archive/volume11/toffoletti, date accessed 4/7/08.

"Top ten unconventional movie mums". Team Boxwish. *Boxwish Bringing Movies to Life,* 20 March 2009, available at http://boxwish.com/features/view/209-top-ten-unconventional-movie-mums?page_number=5, date accessed 5/9/09.

Touboul, Maryse. "Politics, Culture and Language: Jacques Lacan and the Symbolic Language Then, Now and Hereafter." *All Academic Research, 2008,* available at http://www.allacademic.com//meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/0/4/7/2/pages204728/p204728-1.php, date accessed 7/7/2008.

Tucker, Margaret. *If Everyone Cared: Autobiography of Margaret Tucker.* Sydney: Ure Smith, 1977.

Tuleja, Tad, ed. *Usable Pasts: Traditions and Group Expressions in North America.* Logan: Utah State University Press, 1997.

Turkle, Sherry. *Life on Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995.

Turkle, Sherry. "Virtuality and its Discontents: Searching for Community in Cyberspace." Adapted from *Life on the Screen* by Sherry Turkle Reprinted by permission of Simon and Schuster (1995). *American Prospect,* available at http://www.prospect.org/print/V7/24/turkle-s.html Accessed Wednesday, 29th June, 2005.

Umansky, Lauri. "Breastfeeding in the 1990s: The Karen Carter Case and the Politics of Maternal Sexualit." In *"Bad" Mothers: The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century*

America, edited by Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky. New York: New York University Press, 1998, 299-309.

Urban Dictionary, available at http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=yummy%20mummy, date accessed 5/6/08.

"Victoria Beckham 'yummy mummy' and David Beckham 'dishiest dad'." *The Celebrity Blog,* 18th September, 2006, available at http://www.thecelebrityblog.com/index.php?s=Yummy+Mummy, date accessed 7/1/07

VNS Matrix, available at http://lx.sysx.org/vnsmatrix.html.

Wajcman, Judy. *Feminism Confronts Technology.* Cambridge: Polity, 1991.

Wakeford, Nina. "Gender and the Landscapes of Computing in an Internet Café." In *Virtual Geographies: Bodies, Space and Relations*, edited by Mike Crang, Phil Crang and Jon May. London: Routledge, 1999, 178-201.

Walker, Michelle Boulous. *Philosophy And The Maternal Body Reading Silence.* London: Routledge, 1998.

Walker, Nancy A. *A Very Serious Thing – Women's Humour and American Culture.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988.

Walkerdine, Valerie, Helen Lucey, June Melody. "Class Attainment And Sexuality In Late Twentieth Century Britain." Proceedings of the Australian Women's Studies Association Seventh Conference. 16-18th April, Adelaide, South Australia, 1998.

Walsh, Val. "Interpreting Class: Auto/Biographical Imaginations and Social Change." In *Class Matters: 'Working-Class' Women's Perspectives on Social Class,* edited by Pat Mahony and Christine Zmroczek. London, Bristol PA: Taylor and Francis, 1997, 152-174.

Waltner, Ann. Review of *Disembodying Women: Perspectives on Pregnancy and the Unborn*, by Barbara Duden. *Signs* 1, 3 Spring (1996): 759-762.

Wang, Cheng Lu, Yu Zhang, Li Richard Ye, and Dat-Dao Ngyun. "Subscription to Fee-Based Online Services: What Makes Consumer Pay For Online Content?" *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research* 6, 4 (2005): 304-311.

Warner, Jennifer. *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety.* New York: Riverhead Books, 2005.

Webmaster World, available at www.webmasterworld.com, date accessed 6/2/09.

Webster, Frank and Kevin Robins. "The Iron Cage of the Information Society." *Information, Communication & Society* 1 (1998): 23-45.

Weedon, Chris. *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory.* Cambridge Mass: Blackwell Publishing, 2nd Edition, 1997.

Weiner, Jennifer. *Little Earthquakes.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004.

Wellman, Barry and Milena Guila. "Virtual Communities as Communities: Net Surfers Don't Ride Alone." In *Communities in Cyberspace*, edited by M. Smith and P. Kollock. London: Routledge, 1999, 168-194.

Wertheim, Margaret. *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace: A History of Space from Dante to the Internet*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999.

White, Rachel. "Artists Embrace New Media." Australian Government, Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, available at http://www.arts.gov.au/publications/arts_news/artbeat/artbeat_previous_editions/artbeat_spring_2007/artists_embrace_new_media, Spring 2007, date accessed 1/7/08.

Whitford, Margaret. *The Irigaray Reader.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, [1991], 1995).

Wilding, Faith. "Where is the Feminism in Cyberfeminism?" *NeME,* 28th March, 2006, available at http://www.neme.org/main/392/cyberfeminism, date accessed 17/11/07.

Wilding, Faith. Website available at http://faithwilding.refugia.net/ date accessed 6/5/05;

Wilkinson, Stephanie and Jennifer Neisslein. "Tales from the (mother)hood." *Brain Child: the Magazine for Thinking Mothers* Spring (2005) available at http://www.brainchildmag.com/essays/spring2005_niesslein_wilkinson.html, date accessed 26/11/06.

Williams, Jason. "Texture, Topology, Collage and Biology." *Literary Theory and Theorists in Shelley Jackson's Works, Patchwork Girl, Comments Etc*, English 112, (1996), available at http://scholars.nus.edu.sg/cpace/ht/pg/jwpatch.html, date accessed 2/2/2005.

Williams, Linda. "Spectacle or Critique: Reconsidering the Meaning of Reproduction in the Work of Patricia Piccinini." *Southern Review: Communication, Politics and Culture* 37, 1 (2004): 76-94.

Williams, Polly. *The Rise and Fall of a Yummy Mummy.* London: Time Warner Books, 2006.

Williams, Rosalind H. *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-century France.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982.

Williams, Simon and Gillian A. Bendelow. *The Lived Body: Sociological Themes, Embodied Issues*. London; Routledge, 1998.

Williamson, Clare. "Digitalis Australis: The Recent Hybrid in Australian Photography." *History of Photography* 23, 2 Summer (1999): 107-113.

Wilson, Glenn D. "Ideology and Humor Preferences." *International Political Science Review* 11, 4 (1990): 461-472.

Wilson, Janelle L. *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning.* Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 2005.

Wilson, Katherine. "Nurturing a True Balance." Book Review. *TheAge.com.au*, October 8, 2005, available at http://www.theage.com.au/news/book-reviews/nurturing-a-true-balance/2005/10/06/1128562936687.html, date accessed 17/8/06.

"Wimbledon Diary – June 2007." *Wimbledon 2007*, available at http://www.sportinglife.com/tennis/wimbledon2007/features/story_get.dor?STORY_NAME=wimbledon/07/06/28/WIMBLEDON_Diary.html&STORY_TYPE=features, date accessed 5/9/09.

Winner, Langdon. "Electronic Office: playpen or prison." In *Computerization and Controversy* by Rob King. San Diego: Academic Press, 2nd Edition, 1996, 83-85.

Winnicott, D. W. *Playing and Reality*. London: Tavistock, 1971.

Winnicott, D. W. "Primary Maternal Pre-Occupation." In *Collected Papers: Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis* by D.W. Winnicott. London: Tavistock, [1956], 1958.

Winship, Janice. *Inside Women's Magazines*. London: Pandora, 1987.

Wired available at http://www.wired.com/, date accessed 2/5/08.

Wohlpart, James. "A Tradition of Male Poetics: Mary Shelley's Frankenstein as an Allegory of Art." *Midwest Quarterly* 39, 3 (1998): 265-280.

Wolf, Naomi. *The Beauty Myth.* London: Vintage Books, 1991.

Wolff, Janet. "Reinstating Corporeality: Feminism and Body Politics." In *Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, edited by Amelia Jones. London and New York: Routledge, 2003, 414-426.

"Work and Family." *National Statistics Online*. Office for National Statistics, UK Statistics Authority, available at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=1655 , date accessed 5/5/09.

"Working in the 21st century: Most Mothers Work." *US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics*, available at http://www.bls.gov/opub/working/home.htm, date accessed 4/5/09.

Young, Iris Marion. *On Female Body Experience: 'Throwing Like a Girl' and Other Essays.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Young, Iris Marion. "Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation." In *'Throwing Like a Girl' and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* by Iris Marion Young. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, 46-61.

Youngquist, Paul. "Frankenstein: The Mother, the Daughter, and the Monster." *Philological Quarterly* 70, 3 Summer (1991): 339-359.

"Yummy Mummy." *Everything,* available at http://everything2.com/index.pl?node_id=612054,19/6/2000, date accessed 7/1/07.

Zack, Naomi, Laurie Shrage, and Crispin Sartwell eds. *Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality: the Big Question.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.